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THE BLACK WIZARD.

A TALE OF

THE FATAL CIRCLE OF INVISIBLE FIRE.

BY FREDERICK WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF "THE GRIZZLY-HUNTERS," No. 381, Etc.

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THE BLACK WIZARD.
A TABLET OF
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THE BLACK WIZARD.

CHAPTER I.

DEAD MAN'S JOURNEY.

IN the great territory of New Mexico, to the south of Santa Fé, and near the borders of Mexico proper, lies a dreary desert, about eighty miles in length.

It is known by the significant title of JORNADO DEL MUERTO or DEAD MAN'S JOURNEY, among the old Spanish residents of the territory.

Along its dreary expanse no tree blooms. For a stretch of sixty miles there is only a single spring of brackish water. The white skeletons of the unfortunates who have perished there, are the only objects to diversify the level monotony of sand and rock.

The Dead Man's Journey stretches from north to south. Crossing it from east to west it is much narrower. The lofty red peaks of the Organ Mountains shut it in on one side, and a lower range of stony hills separate it from the infant stream of the Rio Grande on the other.

Along this arid expanse, when our story opens, a single horseman was riding, a little ahead of a covered vehicle, drawn by two horses and driven by a person concealed by the projecting tilt in front. The day was intensely hot and sultry, without a breath of wind stirring.

A thick cloud of dust, raised by the feet of the horses, was left hanging in the air long after the wagon had passed. The cavalier in front, glancing out over the desolate prospect, beheld rocks and stones quivering in the stream of heated atmosphere that rose constantly from the parched ground.

The route pursued by the traveler was directly toward the last spring of the Dead Man's Journey, known as Cook's

Spring. He rode on, with his eyes fixed on the ground, following a track that appeared in the sand, marking where wagon-wheels had passed some hours before.

The horseman appeared to be depressed in spirits, as every living thing was, on that scorching plain. The animals plodded sullenly on, with drooping ears, half asleep. It was a long, weary road, but it had to be traveled over, to reach the distant land of gold and silver, the promised Arizona.

The traveler and his equipage were sufficiently remarkable, in that land of the ferocious Apache, to deserve more than a passing notice.

He was no ordinary emigrant. *They* travel in bands, in huge Conestoga ox-wagons, rifle in hand and revolver in belt.

This man had but one light-wheeled wagon, whose neatly-painted and polished body, and strong springs, told of the best makers of New York. It was drawn by two strong, handsome, dapple-gray horses, with a silver-mounted harness, and altogether would have looked far more in keeping on the Broadway pavement, than amidst the sands of the Jornada del Muerto. The rider in the advance was also the very reverse of a frontier emigrant.

He was rather tall, slightly formed and an exceedingly elegant-looking young man, with a pale, clear-cut face, and black hair and mustache. He was dressed in a riding-suit of black velveteen, such as a Central Park dandy might have worn, with natty patent-leather high boots and silver spurs.

But beyond a gold-handled riding-whip, which dangled by its ribbon from his wrist, he was totally and entirely unarmed, even with a pistol.

He rode a magnificent thoroughbred horse, as black as night ; and the light jockey saddle on which he sat was completely concealed by the skirts of his frock coat. The slender beauty of the horse's head was entirely undisguised, for the light reins were attached to a small bit, that was only secured to the lower jaw of the animal by a strap under the chin.

In a word, never were two figures more entirely out of keeping on the wild frontier, than that nattily-dressed cavalier and his delicate-looking steed.

And yet there was a certain expression of quiet power in the sleepy glance of the traveler's dark eyes, as they shone

out from under his broad Panama hat, that seemed to say: "*I know what I am about.*"

After several miles of quiet, steady traveling under the vertical glare of the sun, the traveler for the first time exhibited symptoms of impatience. He pushed back the broad hat from his brow, and drawing out a handkerchief, whose delicate embroidery matched his fastidious appearance, wiped his forehead with a weary air.

Reining in his beautiful steed with a slight motion, he waited until the wagon was alongside of him, when he spoke. His voice and tones were those of a man of refinement, the words clearly articulated and distinct.

"Poor little sister!" said he; "you must be very weary, Juliet. But our journey will soon be over."

The hanging curtain that shielded the driver of the vehicle from view was lifted up, revealing the figure of a girl of about twelve years old, whose large, dark eyes and pale, beautiful face were framed in a shower of black ringlets.

The child was fantastically and richly dressed in a picturesque eastern fashion, in which silks and velvets, gold and jewels were profusely bestowed.

She smiled brightly as she answered:

"Oh! no, Herbert. I am not tired. The tilt of the wagon shields me from the sun. But you, poor brother, you are out in the scorching sun. You must be quite burnt up, Herbert."

"I am used to it, child," was the reply. "But see, Juliet, the hills are ahead of us now. When we have crossed them we shall be able to see Cook's Spring."

"Is that the end of our journey?" asked the child.

"For to-day, yes. I dare not follow that caravan too close, Juliet. Disco is what they call an ugly customer, and he would as soon shoot me on sight as not."

"What makes him hate you, brother?" asked Juliet, innocently. "You never did him any harm."

"I can not tell any more than you, child. Ever since that black-looking nephew of his, Silas Ketchum, came back from California, old Disco has changed his manner toward me. There never were better friends than we two before that."

"And Rose, our dear Rose Geranium, as you used to call her, Herbert. Has she changed too?"

"I think not," said Herbert. "But I have never been able to see her alone, since then. Well, well, we must hope for the best. If I could see *her*, for half an hour, I could defy all the world."

As he spoke the last words he turned his horse's head into a cleft between two low, stony hills that announced the edge of the Dead Man's Journey.

The light wagon followed after, in the old track of broad wheels, and they found themselves shut in from view.

The heat in the narrow gap of the hills was, if possible, more intense than that in the open plain. The walls of sand and rock on either side acted as an oven to scorch and wither every living thing. The horses in the wagon breathed deep and painfully, powerful as they were, and light as was the load behind them.

At last, after winding to and fro among the low hills for some half an hour, they emerged in view of an open plain, and the travelers both uttered a fervent "Thank God!" as a fresh breeze fanned their heated brows.

Almost at the same instant the little girl gave a cry of alarm.

"Indians, Herbert! Look!"

The cavalier scanned the plain before him calmly and in silence. It was sandy and desert still for many miles ahead, but a small clump of trees, scrubby and wilted by the sand-storms, showed the site of Cook's Spring.

A distant green line of dark timber announced the Rio Grande, still a dozen miles ahead, and far away beyond that, the white peaks of the Sierra Mimbres marked the extreme border of the Rio Grande valley.

But what had attracted the child's attention was nearer than all this.

Coming from the direction of Cook's Spring, and directly toward them, walking their horses in single file, was a war-party of Apache Indians about fifty strong.

As soon as ever they saw the solitary wagon, the whole band raised a wild yell of triumph, and dashed toward it at full speed, with couched lances.

"Keep still, Juliet," said the traveler to the girl, who gazed at the Indians, panic-stricken, and screamed twice. "Keep still, child! I have seen these fellows before, in my Mexican trip. They shall not harm a hair of your head."

"But oh! Herbert, what will you do?" ejaculated the child.

"I'll *frighten* them, child. Be easy. Drive on."

A singular spectacle was now presented. A single man, apparently unarmed, rode tranquilly forward on his black horse, to meet fifty savage Indians, of the most merciless tribe on the plains. The Apaches came dashing on, naked to the waist, hideously daubed with fantastic paint, their black hair streaming behind them, their long feathered lances quivering in their nervous grasp.

The pale horseman never relaxed his steady pace toward them, but rode on, about thirty feet ahead of the wagon, to meet the Indians.

His somber dress and stately approach seemed to awe the Apaches in spite of themselves. Accustomed to have nothing but fugitives to pursue, or armed men to fight, the wild Indians could not comprehend an *unarmed* man coming toward them, totally unmoved.

As they came nearer they slackened their pace, and spread out to envelop the wagon, coming to an astonished halt.

The pale traveler on the black horse rode quietly on till he was within ten feet of the chief.

The latter felt secure of his prey. He had heard of the Quakers, the men of peace, who do not fight, and his savage mind conceived the idea that this must be one of them.

He had determined already to play with and torture these lonely travelers. He gave a signal to his braves, who closed in all around the wagon, and rode around and in rear of it as if they had formed a cavalry escort. The savages laughed and joked ferociously together in their wild language, as they looked at the pale, terrified face of little Juliet, who tried to sit straight and show no emotion, but was hardly able.

The chief himself, with a curious look, and an impudent leer, turned his horse to ride alongside of the cavalier in front.

The face of the latter was turned away from him at first.

and shielded by the broad Panama hat. In dead silence the strange horseman continued to ride on, as if he was not aware that an Indian was near. But the chief was not the man to be awed by a grim silence or stately demeanor. He urged his horse close to the other, and, lifting his right hand, smote him on the shoulder familiarly, saying in broken English :

"How do, brudder? Where go?"

As he did so, the stranger turned his face.

With a yell of terror and surprise the Indian started back at the sight that met his view.

The horseman's face was as black as coal! Two huge bristling whiskers stood out on each side of a broad mouth, garnished with four white tusks, and a pair of green, goggle eyes burned above them like fire.

As the amazed savage continued to look, the hair on the stranger's head rose slowly erect, and lifted up the broad Panama hat, as if it stood on a row of wires!

But worse than all, a broad flame of fire issued from that horrible mouth, accompanied with a thick cloud of smoke, as the fearful stranger put forth his slight riding-whip, and laid the end of it *right in the open mouth* of the astounded savage!

The scene that followed was ludicrous in the extreme.

The Apache warriors, hearing the frightened howl of their chief, when the stranger turned his face, rushed forward to annihilate him.

But no sooner did *they* catch sight of that fearful face, with flames and smoke belching from the black cavernous mouth, than a yell of responsive terror burst from them, as they dropped their weapons and stood awe-struck!

They gazed upon their chief, who was next to the stranger. A fearful paroxysm shook every nerve of his powerful frame. His teeth appeared to be clenched by some unseen power on the tip of the light riding-whip, which the stranger held in his hand. He quivered and trembled from head to foot, and a hoarse roar of agony issued from between those teeth that *would not* unclench. His very horse appeared to be infected with the same strange disorder, as, with eyes glaring with terror, the poor beast quivered and trembled from head to foot.

The Indians sat looking at their chief in the power of this mysterious stranger, and a low wail of terror took the place of their late yells. Thus matters lasted for two or three minutes, the chief still shaken to and fro, the demoniacal jaws of the stranger still vomiting flame and smoke, in dead silence. Suddenly the terrible horseman turned his head toward the Indians, raised his left hand in the air with a small white paper parcel in it, and threw it into the midst of the party.

Its effect was terrific !

A loud, sharp explosion was followed by a dense cloud of white smoke, in the midst of which *a shower of flaming liquid* was scattered over the nearest savages !

At the same moment the stranger twitched away the riding-whip from the clenched teeth of the chief, with apparent ease, and gave him a sharp slash over the naked back.

The chief ceased to tremble the instant the whip left his mouth, but remained overwhelmed with terror.

As the cut of the lash struck his naked back, he started off wildly, as fast as his horse could go, and the whole of the lately ferocious war-party fled after him, never halting or resting a moment till they had put the hills between them and the terrible stranger !

As soon as they had gone, the young cavalier took off the black wire mask, which he had assumed with a sleight of hand that bespoke the professional conjuror, and removed from his head the wire, ending in his mouth, wherewith he had made such a formidable erection to his hair.

"See, Juliet," he said, with a gay laugh ; "those Indians are not such terrible fellows after all. A good electric battery, and a little flame and smoke, have made the whole band hunt their holes. Modern science, and judicious hocus-pocus are the champions of civilization in the wilderness. Let us move on. We shall never be disturbed by *those* fellows or any of their tribe. I only wish the miners were as easily fooled."

The girl was over her terror now. Brought up as the confederate and assistant of her brother, Herbert Sinclair, a professional wizard and conjuror, she was amused at the abject panic produced by means *she* knew to be so simple. The dreaded savages at one step sunk to silly idiots, in her young

mind, and she drove on her team of grays without any more fear, to the stunted trees that marked the presence of Cook's Spring.

In an hour afterward, the strange and interesting pair were snugly encamped around the little spring, and Juliet Sinclair was arranging the magic tools that were destined to spread far and wide the fame of the Black Wizard of the Plains.

CHAPTER II.

THE MINERS' CARAVAN.

At the evening of the next day, after the discomfiture of the Apaches by the wizard, a large caravan of wagons was gathered at the borders of the Rio de los Mimbres, just west of Florida Pass in the Los Mimbres Mountains, and about fifty miles from Cook's Spring.

The wagons were about fifty in number, formed into a corral by the banks of the river. The oxen were gathered in a herd, feeding on the rich grass. The horses were secured picket-pins with lariat ropes. Within the circle of the corral, fires were blazing, around whose cheerful light the emigrants were gathered, cooking their evening meal.

The scene was one common enough in the Great West.

Burly red-shirted miners, each with his big revolver in his belt, stood with their tin coffee-cups in their hands joking and swearing. Several of the professional mountain-men, guides and hunters to the caravan, were squatted apart at their own fire. There were a good many women, and a sprinkling of children of all sizes, for the caravan was made up of mining emigrants bound to the silver districts of Arizona.

To one of these fires we will direct our attention. Four people were gathered around it.

The first was an old man of commanding height and strength, whose rough, gray hair and beard gave him a ruder appearance than his keen face warranted, on close examination.

Instead of the rough miner that his dress and build made

him appear to be, George Disco was really a scientific engineer, and a geologist and mineralogist of considerable attainments. He had held posts of honor in his native State, Virginia. Why then was he out here, rough and coarse in looks, *seeking* his fortune at the age of sixty, when it ought to have been already *made*? The answer is given in the one fatal word that has wrecked so many a man of the Anglo-Saxon race, **INTEMPERANCE.**

The bottle, with its enervating and debasing influence, had dragged him down to ruin.

There he stood now by the fire, looking at his son and daughter, and perhaps thinking in his mind how different *ought* to have been the scenes that surrounded them. When he was sober, remorse often seized the heart of Disco, and then he would work with all the powers of his mind for a space. But away from the influence of his daughter Rose, he soon relapsed into his old habits.

To-night he was quiet and sober, kind to his children, though distant and somewhat morose to the rest of the world.

Rose, his daughter and good angel, sat by the fire, on a low stool, making the coffee.

Rose Disco, familiarly known by her father's pet name of "My Rose Geranium," was a very remarkable-looking girl.

She had that snowy-pure complexion which only accompanies auburn hair. Her own locks were of its deepest and richest tint, and still stranger, her large eyes were quite black, deep, luminous and entrancing.

Her features bore that delicate, intellectual beauty never seen so perfect as in America. She was a creature to look at and long for, even in her simple cotton print dress, so neat and tasty withal.

The man who stood near her father was looking and longing for her all the time. Silas Ketchum was a rough, desperate fellow, a Californian gambler and desperado, treacherous, remorseless, a ruffian; who, if report spoke true, had left San Francisco, *for reasons*. But the fugitive from the Vigilance Committee had seemed to change his very nature when he came to visit his uncle Disco and first saw Rose.

No man could look at her long, and not be better. Silas Ketchum had trimmed his tangled black beard into decency,

and smoothed his rough dress and manners since he had known her. In concealing his evil nature he became more dangerous, as the crouching tiger kills more people than the nobler lion.

The fourth member of the party was young Willy Disco, a handsome lad of fifteen, frank, fearless, and impulsive, devotedly fond of his elder sister, and his father's pride in his good moments.

"I say, Silas," said the lad. "Where did you go all the afternoon? We wanted you at one time. The wagon got stuck, and we nearly broke an axle. Father and I had to do all the unloading, and I tell you we wanted help."

Silas grinned agreeably. He hated Willy Disco, for the lad was always laughing at his stories of California. But he was bound to keep up appearances, because of his sister.

"I was off hunting, Master Willy," he said. "I suppose Rose and you are tired of salt pork all the time ; so I thought I'd try to get you a little venison or a piece of buffalo-hump."

"Guess you didn't hunt very far," said Willy, with a laugh. "Your horse looked as if he'd had an easy time all day."

"You're a boy, Master Will," said Silas, in a tone slightly nettled. "When you're a hunter of ten years' standing like me, you'll know that a man doesn't need to gallop all day to find game. Slow and easy, watch and take your time ; more deer are fooled by stalking them than were ever run down, Master Willy."

Willy was about to make a saucy reply to his cousin when he caught his father's eye fixed on him. Disco shook his head, saying gently :

"Will, Will, politeness. Your cousin Silas was very kind to hunt for us. Don't be rude."

Will pouted a little.

"I don't see that he brought in much," he muttered.

"A good reason why, Will," said Ketchum, loftily. "I was going to tell your father the story when you interrupted. You see, sir, I thought I'd stay nigh the old camp awhile this morning. Often wild animals are to be found lurking around, if you hide long enough. So I hid behind some rocks about a mile back from camp where the tracks led to the spring."

"Sure enough, after I'd waited an hour or so, first the wolves began to sneak around camp, and when they were gone, I saw a flock of antelopes about a mile off. So I hid the horse and stuck up a flag to attract the creatures.

"What did you do that for, Silas?" asked Rose.

"To attract them, Rose. Antelopes are such curious creatures that they go to their own death many a time to see what a flag's made of."

"Hurry up with your story, Silas," said Will, irreverently. "Don't be all night telling us you missed shooting one."

"Will," said his father, angrily. "If you don't stop your rude talk I'll box your ears. Go on, Silas."

Silas resumed presently.

"Well, uncle, I waited there till the antelopes got near enough to see them plainly. I do believe I should have got one or two of them, when all of a sudden I saw the old buck start. Something had frightened him. I looked round to see if my horse was in sight, but there was no signs of him. I looked up. The antelopes were off at full speed. And how I did cuss when I saw what had frightened them. A fellow on a black horse riding up to the spring, it was. Behind him, some one was driving a reg'lar New York express wagon, by thunder! Golly! uncle. I never was so mad in all my born days. The cuss was riding on as quiet and unconcerned as you please, and he'd spoilt my shot. I'd a thundering good mind to lay him out for it."

"But you didn't do it, did you, Silas?" asked Rose, earnestly. "You wouldn't be so cruel, so wicked. The poor man couldn't tell that you were there."

"No, cousin Rose," replied the Californian, modestly. "I've seen the time when I've shot a man for less, but that was in my wild days, before I knew *you*."

Will Disce gave a contemptuous snort at the boast, but said nothing.

Ketchum continued:

"I thought, as he'd spoilt my fun, I'd see who he was. I waited till he passed in front of the rocks where I was hid; and who do you think it was? A fellow you all know, the infernal scoundrel!"

"Who?" asked old Disce, in a tone of interest. "Willy."

too, looked at Silas in a doubtful manner, and even Rose glanced shyly up at her cousin's dark face from the fire at which she was cooking.

"Well, then," said Silas, grimly, "it was that infernal smooth-faced villain that I exposed to you, uncle, that Herbert Sinclair, who calls himself the Black Wizard."

Old Disco gave a grunt which might mean *any thing*. He said nothing, but:

"The devil it was!"

Will looked at Silas curiously for some minutes before he spoke. Then he said quietly, with malicious emphasis:

"Then I suppose he's cooked and eaten by this time, coz. You know you swore you could eat him up, *after he'd left Staunton.*"

Silas colored red as fire at the thrust.

"And so I would," he said; "but the scoundrel had a woman or girl with him to-day, that little sister of his who used to act the conjuring tricks with him. I couldn't kill him and leave her alone in the desert to perish—could I, Will? *You* might do it, boy, but old Silas isn't quite such a brute, if he is rough and tough."

And the virtuous Silas looked at the fire with the air of a martyr.

As for Rose, her face was not to be seen. But to judge from the scarlet flush on the back of her neck she must have found cooking warm work.

"What's Sinclair doing out here?" growled old Disco; "he don't expect to ride across the plains, and make money exhibiting to miners—does he?"

"Well, uncle, I can't say," said Silas, with engaging frankness. "I will do justice to the scoundrel. He drew immense crowds in California. The miners used to pelt the stage with nuggets, after his great bottle feat. He could certainly do the thing up in splendid style. But, how he's going to cross the plains alone is more than I can tell."

"Is he alone?" asked Willy Disco, keenly.

"Perfectly, except for that sister, Juliet. The child drives the wagon behind a pair of grays that must have cost a cool fifteen hundred at least. The wagon's span new, and he ~~don't even~~ carry a pistol. If the Indians catch him, they'll

have a nice haul, for they say he carries a whole chest of greenbacks in that wagon."

"But what's he doing *here*?" again growled Disco. "If I catch him snoopin' round Rose, I'll put a head on him."

Silas grinned maliciously, as he looked at Willy's face, for he knew the lad loved Sinclair.

Rose put a stop to further conversation by bustling about and announcing that supper was ready. When she turned her face to them, it was deathly pale. Silas Ketchum smiled secretly at his own thoughts.

CHAPTER III.

THE APACHE CAMP.

THE lodge-fires were burning low, and the squaws had gone out to pick up buffalo-chips to replenish them. The old men sat in a circle at the door of the council-lodge, smoking their long calumets.

The Indian encampment was spread out by the banks of a little stream, that rushed out of a narrow gorge, at the foot of the giant sierra. The pasturage was rich, and game plentiful in the neighborhood. There were only about a dozen warriors in camp. The rest were away, part on a grand buffalo-hunt and the others with the war-chief, Flying Arrow, on the war-path against the whites.

The old men were conversing together in sententious style, several of them being magicians or medicine-men.

"Flying Arrow is a great chief," said White Bull, the patriarch of the tribe. "Can the Serpent tell us why he tarries so long?"

The Serpent (head medicine-man of the Apaches) puffed a volume of smoke from his pipe ere he answered:

"The Great Spirit speaks to the Serpent when *his* ears alone are open. In dreams, in the still night, in the murmur of the water, the sigh of the breeze, the Serpent hears the voice of Manitou. He is the great wizard of the plains, and the red-men do him reverence."

"But has the Manitou told the Serpent aught of Flying Arrow?" asked the old chief.

The Serpent made no reply for some minutes, during which he looked steadfastly at the ground, the smoke slowly curling from his nostrils. Then he said :

"The Serpent is a wise medicine-man. Who can tell all his wisdom? The Manitou spake to him in dreams last night, and told him of Flying Arrow. The chief is a great chief, and many scalps are hanging in the smoke of his wigwam. But many more are yet to come, and the Apache nation shall take them from the foe."

And the Serpent closed his oracular mouth, having told his hearers about what they already knew. But his reputation for wisdom was such, that his meaning was thought to be obscure at all times, and the chiefs sat silent around him, trying to convince themselves that a favorable auspice was meant to be inferred.

The Serpent was always careful in his predictions, and was not easily caught napping.

How long he might have temporized with general answers is uncertain, had not at this minute one of the young warriors, outlying as a scout, dashed into camp with the announcement that Flying Arrow's band was in sight and coming across the prairie. Almost at the same time a second came in to say that the hunting-party had sent in to ask for horses to carry meat home.

The Serpent smiled with superior wisdom, as who should say, "I told you so."

No emotion was manifested by any of the chiefs in the old man's circle, although they were dying to hear the news. They waited in silence, while the squaws and children ran shrieking and yelling about, to welcome the new-comers.

At last the rapid tramp of horses was heard, and Flying Arrow and his braves rode into camp. The warriors dispersed sullenly and in silence into the different lodges in camp, but the chief came up to the circle of old chiefs and medicine-men, and squatted himself down among them cross-legged, without a word. Every man in the circle cast a glance at Flying Arrow, from under his half-closed eyelids, but no one spoke.

The chief was a tall, powerful man, in the prime of life, with the face of a lion at most times. He was noted for his bravery and success on the war-path, against soldiers and citizens, white or Mexican.

But Flying Arrow looked worn and haggard, as if he had been through some tremendous shock. He seemed to be so weak as hardly to be able to sit up. And yet he had not been unsuccessful. At his belt hung five fresh scalps, and three of them *had long hair*.

What was the matter? No one dared to ask.

Presently Flying Arrow spoke, in a weak, tremulous voice, addressing himself to the council.

"My fathers," he said, "you are doubtless waiting to hear how Flying Arrow has prospered. Listen. My band has been to Chihuahua, and we have taken fifty-seven scalps *of all kinds*. Thirty-two had long hair. Eleven were children."

A grunt of ferocious approval told how his speech suited his hearers' taste.

Flying Arrow continued:

"My fathers, would that my tale ended here. But only yestermorn I met *the Black Spirit*."

A silence full of awe fell on the circle, till old White Bull timidly inquired:

"How did you know him, brother?"

"My father, it was the Evil Spirit himself, in the likeness of a pale-face traveler on horseback. My young men swooped down on him as he rode in front of a little wagon driven by a girl. I rode up to him myself, and spoke to him, taking him for a man of peace. But oh! my fathers, it was the Evil Spirit himself, and no other. He turned his face on me, and lo! it was black, and fire came from its mouth!"

A low murmur went round the circle of superstitious Indians, all but the medicine-men. Professional jugglers, *they* were not so easily duped.

"And worse followed," continued the chief. "The spirit stretched forth a little whip and placed it in my mouth, and lo! my teeth clenched, and horrible pains ran through me. My head felt as if some one was pounding it with clubs, and my strength was as water. My horse trembled and shook, and neither of us could move from the place. My young

men were so sore afraid that they could not shoot, and the Black Spirit held me there till I felt as if dying. Then he released me, and gave me a cut across the back with that terrible whip. See the wound."

And he showed a deep bloody cicatrice, like the track of a whip, on his naked back.

"Then we fled," continued Flying Arrow. "All and each. We fled like coyotes, for who could stand the wrath of the Black Spirit. And here we are."

The old chiefs who heard the strange story, listened to it with awe and amazement. The medicine-men themselves were much disconcerted, and the Serpent was the only one who attempted to cast discredit upon it.

"The Black Spirit is naught," said the medicine-man, contemptuously. "The Serpent is the servant of the Great Spirit of heaven and earth. He fears not the Black Demon."

Flying Arrow looked at the medicine-man. "You never saw him," he said, simply. "We have, and we know him."

"Who is Flying Arrow to talk to the servant of the Great Manitou?" asked the Serpent haughtily. "The chief must be great who can talk to the Serpent. I am the medicine-man who can smite the whole tribe with the back death if I will, and I fear not any Black Spirit of them all. I, the Serpent, will drive him out."

"Then you have an easy chance," said Flying Arrow, in a tone of anger. "He has gone into camp, be he spirit or man, wizard or demon, at Cook's Spring, not five hours' journey from this."

"Then he can not be a demon," said the Serpent. "He must be a man. We, the great medicine men of the Apaches, will try our enchantments against him, and kill him."

The Serpent had just made his valiant proposition when a cry from the squaws announced that a stranger was approaching.

The council sat silent and still, while a big, black-bearded man, no other than Silas Ketchum, rode boldly into the middle of the Apache camp with a coolness that bespoke his familiarity with its inmates.

The Californian threw the rein of his horse over the post that stood before the council-lodge, and dismounting, stalked up and seated himself uninvited in the circle.

CHAPTER IV.

FORKED TONGUE.

THE first person to speak was Silas. He was never much troubled with superfluous politeness. He addressed the war-chief as an old acquaintance.

"How do, Flying Arrow?" he said, familiarly. "I want you and your band for a job *like the last one*."

Flying Arrow's eyes glittered as he answered:

"Good. Black Wolf great warrior. Got forked tongue—ha? Fool white man, help red. Good."

Silas laughed like a triumphant devil.

"Ha! Arrow. We did *that* job up, brown. No one left to tell tales, except *poor Silas*—ha! ha! What a time he had getting to fort Benton and how ragged he was! hey? Well, red-skin, there's another job just as good on hand now. There's a hundred wagons—no—fifty, I mean. They're loaded with every thing you want. Meat, powder, knives, axes, rum, old fellow, good whisky, make Injuns' hearts like little birds, all within a day's journey of here."

Contrary to Silas' expectation, the chiefs did not jump at his offer so readily. There was an embarrassed silence in the circle till Ketchum asked:

"What's the matter, Arrow? What are you fellers so glum about? Spit it out, man."

The chief replied in gloomy tones:

"Heart sad. Meet Black Spirit. Near kill Injun."

"What do you mean? Who are you talking of?"

"Man at Cook's Spring. Black horse. Black wagon. Black all over. Injun's heart sink dead."

After a few questions, Silas elicited the fact that his enemy, the conjurer, was the person intended by the description.

As soon as he had heard of the stranger's appearance, he endeavored to persuade the Indians that there was nothing to fear, that the conjurer only did things which many other men could do, *etc. etc.*

Flying Arrow put him down at once with the simple questions :

"Can you eat fire? Can you make a man and a horse tremble from head to foot? He can."

Silas, who was in reality an ignorant fellow, entirely devoid of scientific knowledge, was forced to admit that the stranger had done terrible things. Indeed, despite his hardihood, he began to recollect the superstitious miners' remarks in California, that "Sinclair must be in league with the devil."

He tried to forget the impression by leading the talk to the subject he wished to open. This was neither more nor less than the deliberate betrayal of the whole party of miners with whom he was traveling, into the hands of the Apaches, to be slaughtered, men, women and children.

The scheme was so utterly diabolical in its selfish atrocity, that most men would have looked down while proposing it.

Not so Silas. *He had done it before.*

Only one short summer ago he was traveling with another party, *returning* from the mines. The party had been cut off and massacred to a man, all but Silas.

He excited great commiseration when he made his appearance at Fort Benton, hungry and ragged. He had a tale to tell, true in every particular, *but one*. The wound he showed was inflicted by himself. The Indians took horses, cattle and arms. Silas' share was the gold of the miners.

The bargain was satisfactory to both sides. Silas sneaked out of Fort Benton in clothes supplied by charity; and went and dug up his hidden gold, wherewith he had "spread it" so long in New Orleans.

It was when at the end of his money that he had met his uncle Disco, in whose company he now was; and it was his own relations that he was about to consign to the tender mercies of the Apaches.

"Now then, chief," he said, "here's the bargain you can make. I'll tangle up the train and get the wagons stuck. I'll stampede the oxen for ye if ye like. I'll get the party scattered, so as you can do what you like with 'em, and I'll spoil the ammunition so as they can't fire a shot. You'd better come in the night. Is that good?"

"Good!" grunted Flying Arrow; and he turned to trans

late the sentence to his companions, who did not speak English.

White Bull answered in the Apache language :

"And what does the Fork-tongue want in return?"

"Every thing in the pockets of the dead men," returned Silas, coolly. "Greenbacks are no use to you, and they're all I want except one thing. There's a girl in the train with red-gold hair and dark eyes. Not a man of you must touch her or you'll rob no more caravans. I want *her* for myself. If not you can't have the train. Is that good?"

Flying Arrow repeated the terms, and the Indians gave a grunt of approval.

"Take money. Take squaw," said Flying Arrow. "Il-jun want powder and rum. That all. Keep squaw."

"Well then, it's a bargain," said Silas. "Remember that I shall pretend to fight you and shall carry the girl off on my horse. Your men must fire over my head and let me escape. Is that good, too?"

"Why for?" asked Flying Arrow, suspiciously. "Why not stay with us?"

"Because I shall have the gal with me, chief, and I'm a-going back to the States to get ye more caravans to plunder. That's why. I must keep up my character, you know. If once it gets out what I've done, I'll have to come and live with ye for good. Much good that will be."

Flying Arrow assented to this.

"As for the money," continued Silas, "I want you fellows to act square. No burning of bodies with the pockets full of greenbacks. The pockets and trunks must be searched, and all the money and papers you find, collected together. They're to be buried one hundred paces from Cook's Spring, to the east, in a line with the stunted *yucca* tree. Is that good?"

"Good!" replied the chief, with a scarcely perceptible sneer. "Is Fork-tongue done?"

"That's all for the present," said Silas. "How many warriors have you? There's a hundred and seven men and boys at the train."

"The Apache warriors will be enough," said Flying Arrow, boldly. "They are not used to the counting of foes. Is Fork-tongue done?"

"Yes," said Silas. "Guess so. What's the matter, chief?"

"My nostrils scent a traitor," said Flying Arrow, disdainfully. "Go, Fork-tongue. You shall have your reward."

Silas felt the thrust through even his thick cuticle. He tried to laugh it off, saying:

"Very well, very well, chief. Hard words break no bones. I shall have my money, you your arms and powder. We both get what we want—ha! ha!"

But his laugh was somewhat forced, as he rose and went to his horse, crying: "The day after to-morrow, chief. Come at night, I'll have it all ready."

"Good!" grunted Flying Arrow for the last time. Then Silas got on his horse and galloped away toward the miners' camp, which he reached at sunset.

The wonderful story that he made up, as we have seen, was a pure fiction of his inventive brain. His only means of information on the subject of Herbert Sinclair, were the stories of the Indians, whose confederate he was.

As he swallowed the coffee, handed him by Rose, the man might have felt a sort of swelling in his throat, but Silas Ketchum was not much troubled with a conscience. He had seared it long ago with the brand of crime.

While supper was going on that night, old Disco was moody and reserved. He watched Rose out of the corner of his eye, all the time. Indeed, in this he was only imitating Ketchum, whose black brows hid the sly glances he gave ever and anon toward the girl.

Rose, on her part, saw nothing, *apparently*.

Really, she saw both, and was setting her woman's wits to work for a way of communicating with her lover.

Willy Disco was her sworn ally in all this matter, and came to her help without being asked.

"I say, father," he said; "don't you wish Sinclair would join our caravan? We'd have a fine time every evening."

Old Disco looked at his son in silence for some minutes. Then he said, slowly:

"No, I don't, Will. Sinclair is a bad man, a very bad man, not fit to associate with decent people."

"Why, what has he done, father?" asked Willy, in an innocent tone.

"Never mind, boy. There are some things not fit for boys to hear, and especially their sisters. I liked Sinclair very well before I knew what I now do about him. As it is, if I ever find him addressing a word to my daughter, I shall shoot him on sight."

"But, father," said Willy, boldly, "you're not *certain* that he is such a bad man. I know it by the look in your eye. Some backbiting coward has told you this, who can not prove it, I know."

George Disco bent his heavy gray brows on his son in a portentous frown, but the lad never quailed. His father turned away his head, to conceal a certain grim smile that crossed his features, in spite of himself. Rose listened with all her ears for a reply.

At last the engineer said:

"If I was certain beyond a doubt, I would have killed him in Staunton. As it is, the suspicion is such, that until it is completely disproved, I can never let the man speak to either of you again."

Willy sighed and muttered:

"I know who told you, the mean——"

Old Disco again turned his head to hide a smile, as Silas Ketchum spoke up, angrily:

"If you mean me, Master Will, there's no back-down to my words. I can prove what I say, that that Herbert Sinclair is an infernal, designing——"

"Hold!" interrupted the deep voice of Disco. "We've had enough for to-night, boys. Will, go to bed. Rose, we start early to-morrow, and you'll need sleep, child. Kiss me good-night, and go to rest."

Rose approached her father, and the giant old man folded his arms around her for a moment.

"Good-night, little Rose Geranium," he said, fondly, stroking her golden-red curls with his great hand. Then he stood for a moment, his daughter's head pressed against his breast, looking sadly out over the darkened landscape. A sort of a sob burst from his deep chest, as he muttered: "I've been a poor father to you, child. God help me to do better. Good-night."

He kissed her forehead and sent her away to the wagon.

Silas Ketchum stood brooding moodily by the fire. The sight of father and daughter, stirred strange feelings in his mind. When old Disco returned and sat down again, neither spoke for some time.

At last Silas got up.

"Where are you going?" growled Disco.

"Well, uncle," said the Californian, with a forced laugh that fell far short of being jolly, "you looked glum, and I feel sort o' down-hearted. Let's take a drink to drown care."

"Leave the cursed bottle alone," said Disco, savagely. "See here, Silas, you're the devil that's been tempting me to drink all the past year. Now you leave it alone. I've been a brute beast long enough. I'm going to try to be a man again. I was once. To-morrow morning I shall stave in that whisky-barrel. Yes, by heavens! It's the only way I can get clear, curse my weak mind!"

"Better not," said Silas, with a sort of snarl. "If you can't keep sober, I can; and take a drink too, now and then. Besides, that whisky's mine, not yours. You've no right to touch it. Remember your mortgage."

Disco ground his teeth.

"I remember that I'm in your power, as to the law," he said, savagely; "but how is it *out here*?"

"You won't take prairie law on me, uncle," said Silas coolly. "You Virginians are too honorable to pay your debts by repudiating them. I gave you honest money, and I want either that or Rose."

"I've told you already, Silas, that I won't force the girl's heart. If she likes you, well and good. If not, I'll pay you the money, if I have to sell every stick I own," and old Disco gave a heavy sigh. As Silas had said, honor restrained him from quarreling with his nephew till he was paid. Silas began to perceive that he would do well to propitiate his uncle, for Disco's passionate nature might lead him to take cold steel for his payment even yet. He therefore assumed a friendly air.

"See here, uncle," he said. "There's no need for us to quarrel about a barrel of whisky. I love it even less than you. You want to shake off your tyrant. I won't oppose you if you keep your mind all to-morrow. I'll tell you what

I'll do with you. To-morrow night we'll invite the whole camp, women, children, and all to hold a grand spree. We'll finish the barrel and burn the staves, and so take leave of drunkenness forever. What do you say to that?"

"Any thing you please," said Disco, sighing heavily. "It's not your fault, Silas, that I make a beast of myself. It's my own. Don't talk any more to-night. Good-night."

The old man turned away without another word, and sought his couch under the wagon. Silas looked after him with a scornful smile.

"Old fool," he muttered. "If I let whisky take hold of me, as it does you, where would my wits be? No, no, uncle Disco, you've a deal of edication, but one grain of gumption's worth it all. Drink! ay, you shall drink. The whole pile of you shall drink. But if there ain't as much laudanum in the whisky as will put you all to sleep like drunken hogs, my name ain't Silas."

The villain shook himself, and rose to his feet with a chuckle at his scheme.

"No time like to-night," he muttered. "After they're all asleep, I'll doctor the stuff."

Silas glanced furtively around at the fires. They were nearly deserted, one or two men on post as camp-guards being the only moving figures visible. The Californian refilled his short clay pipe, and stooped down to light it at the fire, when a voice behind him startled him.

"Better be snoozin', stranger," it said, gruffly. "'Arly start to-morrow."

"Ay, ay," said Silas, looking round at the gruff speaker. "I ain't troubled with snoozin' much. Say, stranger, like a drink?"

The other, a thick-set and burly man, with a huge red beard, showed his teeth in a grin.

"Reckon I would," he said.

"How would ye like some prime old Monongahela?" asked Patchum. "Would it go good?"

The miner grinned again.

"You bet," was all he said.

"Come along then," said Silas, chuckling. "I've got some of the real old stuff in our wagon. To-morrow I'm a-goin'

to treat the whole camp to a big spree. D'ye like the notion?"

"You bet," said fiery-beard again, with a chuckle.

Silas turned away, and preceded the red-beard to the wagon, the other man laughing to himself softly.

"Say," whispered Silas. "What in thunder are ye chucklin' at. Don't make such a blasted noise. "You'll wake the gal in the wagon."

"All right, boss," said fiery-beard. "Won't speak a word."

Silas went to the rear of the wagon and listened. Old Disco and his son were under the wagon, and their regular breathing convinced him that they were asleep. He listened attentively by the head of the vehicle, under the tilt of which beautiful **Rose** made her couch.

He could just distinguish her soft breath.

"All right," he whispered to fiery-beard. "Whisky's by the tail-board."

The two men softly went round to the rear of the wagon, and Silas and his companion lifted the tail-board off its hooks without noise. There was the barrel of whisky with the brass tap exposed to view.

"Say," whispered Silas. "You stand outside and watch, and if any one stirs, you give me a signal. They'd be awful mad if they caught us drinkin' the whisky unbeknown to them."

"All right," growled fiery-beard, so unnecessarily loud that Silas uttered an angry, "'Sh-sh-sh!"

The red-bearded miner withdrew till he stood by the front of the wagon, close to Rose Disco's head, where he leaned against the wheel in silence.

Meanwhile Silas softly produced a bottle from a box in the wagon, which he as softly and gently filled from the tap without awaking any one. He placed it on the ground, produced a second one, and performed the same operation to it.

Then he turned to look outside the wagon, and started with a low cry of astonishment.

The red-bearded miner had his head close to the side of the wagon and was looking in!

Before Silas could say a word, the other beckoned to him and whispered:

"Gal was stirrin', I thought, but she's snoozin' fast as a mud-turtle in its hole. Go on, stranger. I'll see she don't wake."

"Good boy!" whispered Silas, grinning with delight. "You keep a good watch, *while I water the stuff in the barrel*, so they won't know it's been taken."

Fiery-beard grinned in responsive appreciation, and Silas returned to his post. But not to *water* the whisky.

Diving into the recesses of his own private chest, which stood by the barrel, he fished out a large bottle of white glass, full of some dark-brown liquid. The bottle must have held nearly two quarts.

"Guess you'll do," muttered Silas to himself, as he softly withdrew the bung in the top of the barrel, which was only loosely secured there, with a piece of rag round it. The traitor emptied into a thirty-two gallon cask of whisky, about two-thirds full now, half a gallon of laudanum, enough to drug the whole camp into a stupid sleep.

"And if that won't do, this will," said he to himself, as he emptied about three ounces of morphine in, at the same hole. "If you ain't doctored to-morrow night, 'twon't be my fault. It did the time before, and it ought to now."

The traitor replaced the bung in the hole, and put away the empty bottle in his chest. As he did so, with all his care, a faint clink was audible.

Meantime, the fiery-bearded gentleman in front of the wagon had been acting in a remarkable manner. Instead of watching, as he should have done, for spies, he was actually engaged in a whispered conversation with the fair sleeper under the tilt!

Sleeper we call her, for Rose was, to all appearance, fast asleep within. She lay perfectly still, and when she spoke it was as a somnambulist might.

"Rose," whispered fiery-beard, "whatever they say of me, believe nothing that is not said to my face."

"I never did, Herbert," murmured innocent Rose Geranium

"There is danger round you," whispered fiery-beard
"I do not know what; but the villain Silas is after some nefarious scheme, with the Indians. I saw him coming from their camp this morning."

"He says he saw you, Herbert," whispered the girl.

"He lies," answered fiery-beard. "He must have heard it from the Indians. I frightened their whole tribe yesterday, with a few tricks. But he is on good terms with them, and mischief's afoot."

"What is it, Herbert?" whispered the girl.

"I'll tell you to-morrow," whispered fiery-beard. "Silas has finished his job. Good-night. Always love me, Rose."

"Always, Herbert," answered Rose, softly.

Then fiery-beard dropped the awning like a falling feather, and stole to the rear of the wagon. He peeped through a rent and detected Silas in the act of throwing in the little white package of morphine.

"So," muttered fiery-beard to himself. "I think I see the job, now. Drug the camp and let the Indians in. Well, well, master Silas, we'll see if we can't spoil your little game to-morrow night."

Presently Ketchum emerged with the two bottles in his hand, and beckoned to the other.

The two proceeded to the fire, and sat down, each with a bottle in his fist.

Fiery-beard made a grimace and elevated his bottle.

"Luck, stranger," he said, hoarsely, and inverted the bottle at his lips. He held it there for over a minute, his throat working as if swallowing, and set it down on the grass behind him with a sigh of content. "That's the stuff, stranger," said he, in the gruff tones he assumed with Silas. "Rot-gut for ever! Why in thunder don't yer drink. Fair's the word, stranger."

Silas took a deep draught in reply, and fiery-beard seized the opportunity to tip the bottle behind him over on the grass and spill about three-fourths of the contents.

He had not drank a single drop, himself.

When Silas put down the bottle, the keen eyes of the stranger detected the fact of a great diminution. fiery-beard assumed his jolliest air, and swore that he could finish his bottle sooner than the other.

Silas was sufficiently flushed by his own drink to accept the challenge. He raised the bottle and drank on as hard as he could. Fiery-beard raised his, and made the same motion

as before. Then, to the amazement of Silas, he showed him the bottle perfectly empty, shaking the last few drops over the fire in testimony.

Ketchum had drunk a whole quart bottle of fiery whisky at two draughts. The result may be easily imagined. Five minutes after, fiery-beard rose quietly from his seat, and bestowing a kick upon the senseless carcass of the drunkard, vanished in the darkness.

CHAPTER V.

THE BLACK WIZARD'S MAGIC CIRCLE.

As soon as the man in the red beard left the fire, he walked down to the border of the stream that formed one side of the corral.

There was no guard on this side, showing the carelessness of the emigrants. Their only fear appeared to be for their herds of cattle and horses, which were each provided with a couple of sentries.

The red-bearded man threw himself on the ground and listened intently. All the camp was still and silent. Then he quietly rolled over and over into the water, entering it without a single splash, and floating away down-stream with his face just visible on the surface.

Paddling with his hands into the middle of the stream, he allowed the current to carry him past the camp, and away for about a quarter of a mile, till a tall oak tree on the bank arrested his eye.

Then he turned over on his face, and regained the shore with a few vigorous but silent strokes. Arriving at the bank, he did not rise to his feet. He crawled slowly and noiselessly up the slope, and lay down at the foot of the tree to listen. Every thing was deathly still.

Then the stranger took off the red wig and beard which had disguised him, stripped off the coarse clothes he had worn over all, and produced from the foot of the tree a black bag, from which he took out dry clothes.

When he assumed these last, had it been light you could have recognized the slim figure and graceful carriage of Herbert Sinclair, the conjurer.

"So," he said to himself, as he wrung out his wet clothes and packed them in the sachel. "These miners are not much harder to fool than the Indians. I'll have Rose in spite of this villain Ketchum. What has he said to old Disco about me, I wonder? Rose doesn't know. If I'd had time, I might have got it out of him, the drunken fool. Well, well. I must do my best. Now for home."

As he spoke he set off across the dark prairie toward a grove of cottonwoods at a little distance. As he entered it, he was greeted with a low whinny from his beautiful black.

"Hush! Sultan," said the wizard, quietly. "No noise, sir. Indians may be about."

The horse ceased its noise, as if understanding its master. Sinclair strapped the little black bag behind the saddle, and mounted the animal, directing his course to the north, where the mountains rose up at a few miles' distance.

He had not proceeded more than a mile, when the horse suddenly halted and snorted.

They were at the time in a low hollow of the prairie between two little swells. The conjurer drew rein and listened. Presently the shrill neigh of an approaching horse warned him that other night-riders were about. His own steed was about to answer, when the conjurer leaped from the saddle, and grasped the animal's nostrils firmly.

There was a little pause of listening, and then Sinclair heard the deep voices of several Indians in talk on the other side of the knoll.

The conjurer seemed to take his resolution at once, when he ascertained who his neighbors were. In a single second it seemed, so rapid were his practiced hands, he had drawn out and thrown over himself an immensely long and wide cloak of black gauze, which covered over horse and all, sweeping to the very ground. But the wonderful thing of this cloak was, that it flamed all over with a pale, corpse-like blue glimmer, inexpressible ghostly in the darkness. Leaping on Sultan's back, Sinclair galloped over the little swell, and found himself close to a party of some dozen Indians.

As soon as the savages saw the fiery cloak, with its unearthly glimmer, with one accord they turned their horses and fled, yelling with superstitious terror.

But the Black Wizard was not satisfied with this. It was important to his future safety to continue the moral effect of yesterday's performance.

Spurring the swift racer he rode, he shot up alongside of the Indians in an incredibly short space of time, and scattered several of the little packets of petroleum and percussion-powder among them, which burst, showering the liquid flame all round, and lashing with his long riding-whip. The Indians scattered and fled in all directions, wild with terror.

The Black Wizard pursued for a little distance, till he came to a second hollow, down which the Indians plunged at full speed.

Then he turned his horse, and disappeared over the edge of the knoll, seeming as if he had sunk into the earth. The great black cloak with its blue flame was stripped off, and rolled up once more in the round box, containing phosphorus and oil, in which it was kept, for use at such times.

"Good!" laughed Sinclair, as he galloped on. "Who says that the Indians are dangerous?"

The young conjurer went full speed toward the mountains now, and in less than a quarter of an hour was within their shadow. He rode along the base for some distance to the north, when a light struck his eye, as it seemed from the bowels of the mountain. It turned out to proceed from the bottom of a deep narrow gorge in the hillside, down which he turned, and rode boldly in.

The path appeared to be familiar to his horse, for the animal proceeded quietly along through the thick darkness, till it finally emerged on green grass, in front of a little white tent, to be greeted by the glad whinnies of the noble grays, tethered close by.

The little camp of the conjurer was marvelously snug and pleasant. A deep black pool, under a precipice of rock, was formed by the trickling of a stream over the semicircular sweep of wall that hemmed in the little plot of ground from the prairie without. The dark, shining oil-skin cover of the wagon glittered in the light of a lamp from the tent door.

This lamp also glittered on a slight fence of brass and steel wire, which surrounded the tent with a fairy circle. It was so light and frail that a wolf could have knocked it over, and yet it was stronger for protection than a stone wall.

Herbert Sinclair dismounted in the glade outside this little fence, and his sister Juliet came out of the tent, smiling brightly.

"Come in, Herbert," she said. "I have cut the circle."

The young man advanced to the tent and opened a little gate in the fence. Since the battery was disconnected it was perfectly harmless.

"Juliet," he said, "we must either put this light out or shade it, child. I saw it from the outside. It's a wonder some wandering Indian hasn't been here before this."

"But he couldn't get in," said Juliet, with a laugh. "I took care to put on the battery, as soon as you went. I felt safe enough, whoever came."

"True enough, child," he replied. "But the fence would not prevent a bullet from reaching you from the outside. We'll put on the shade or move the light this way. Now no one can see it. And now tell me, child: have you not felt a little bit afraid all alone here, with savages and wild beasts all round you?"

"Not a bit," she answered, brightly. "There was nothing to fear, you know. What have *you* done, Herbert?"

"I've been into the enemy's camp," he replied. "I've seen and spoken to Rose. She loves me as well as ever."

"Good!" said the child, clapping her hands. "And what has been the matter all the time?"

"I do not know, Juliet. Rose does not know herself. That scoundrel Ketchum, who ought to be hung for murder by rights, has told old Disco something about me—I don't know what—and he swears that he'll shoot me on sight if he catches me speaking to Rose."

"What can he have said?" asked Juliet.

"I can not think, child. But I've found out something else too. Master Ketchum is hatching some plot, in which drugged liquor is to play a part. I caught sight of him this morning coming from the Indian camp. He must be going to betray his party into their hands, and probably to get

Rose into his power. I must thwart this amiable scheme, Juliet."

"Of course," said the child, confidently. She believed that her brother could do any thing and every thing.

Sinclair smiled at her tone.

"Well, Juliet," he said, "I shall ride into the Indians' camp to-morrow, and find out what's the matter; and at night, it will go hard if I don't foil them. Now, then, little sister, go to bed. I will bar out intruders on our little domicile."

So saying the conjurer rose and proceeded to make their retreat safe for the night. His preparations were simple.

He took in his hand a double wire on a reel, with which he proceeded to the mouth of the little circular inclosure, the wire unwinding as he went. He took this down the narrow gorge for some distance, pegging it into the banks on either side with glass-headed pegs, on which the wire hung. Joining the two wires at the end so as to bar the whole passage, about waist high, he returned to the tent, and connected it with a huge horse-shoe magnet, before whose poles a steel bar spun round and round by clock-work.

"There," said Sinclair, triumphantly. "Any living being that touches that wire will remember it a long time to come."

And in truth the battery was powerful enough to kill an ox at a stroke, far more so than the little pocket battery whose effects had paralyzed the Apache chief, Flying Arrow, the day before.

Then the conjurer retired to the wagon and lay tranquilly down to sleep, guarded by the ever-wakeful power of the lightning.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YOUNG ANTELOPE-HUNTER.

WHEN Silas Ketchum awoke, it was early dawn. The creeping chill of the morning, and the soaking of the heavy dews, combined to rid him of the fumes of the liquor he had drank. He sat up by the dead fire, dejected and miserable, his head splitting and his mind confused.

The sight of the empty bottle on the grass, recalled to him his drinking friend, fiery-beard. He looked around for him, but no fiery-beard was to be seen.

"He must have a darned strong head," muttered Silas. "One bottle was enough for me, and he didn't seem to mind it. Wonder who he was? Half forgotten his face."

Silas rose to his feet, though he still staggered a little. "How my head splits!" he muttered; "and I daresn't take a drink 'cause I've doctored the whisky."

Poor Silas was in a bad condition truly, with a splitting headache, and having to assist in hitching up. He looked at the miners crawling out from under the wagons, and wished that he felt as well as they.

But fresh air and breakfast soon restored his usual equanimity, and he was particularly attentive to his cousin Rose.

Willy Disco noticed his pale face, and rallied him on it, but Silas was unusually good-tempered with the lad, and the latter desisted. The fact was that Silas was thinking of how young Will's scalp would look that evening, and he could afford to be good-tempered in view of the coming vengeance.

When the train hitched up and started, Silas lagged behind as usual. Laziness, however, was not now his reason for the delay. He knew that his friends and allies, the Apaches, would be in wait somewhere, and he wished to warn them off until the train was ready to be delivered to them. It would not do to excite the miners' suspicions, Silas thought, or they might object to drinking, with Indians near.

So the villain allowed the train to go out of sight ahead,

when he started on a gallop to ride a circuit and come out to the advance of all.

Silas owned a splendid horse. He had bought it with the last of his illgotten booty on the last act of treason. It carried him forward with great speed, the Californian shielding himself from view at every little swell of ground, and in about an hour he had gained on the train sufficiently to ride straight ahead.

Meantime old Disco rode slowly on with Willy, by the side of the wagon that contained Rose. The old man was much more cheerful that morning, in view of the promise Silas had made him. Disco had grown to loathe the very name of rum, although he knew too well his weakness, if it were placed before him, even at that moment. That weakness would be spared if the temptation were removed, and Disco felt glad.

Rose, too, with her bright smile, was so unusually gay that morning, that her father was glad to see her. She had been silent and unhappy of late, he remembered.

"How beautiful every thing looks this morning, father," exclaimed the girl. "Those mountains! What a deep purple, and how the snow on their tops shines out! Is it not lovely? I'm so glad we came here, father! We shall be quite travelers before we've done."

"Ay, ay, Rose," said her father, smiling. "Travel enough. I remember when I was your age, I longed to travel all the time, and now I want to rest."

"Who would want rest when travel is so pleasant?" said Rose. "See, father! There's a herd of antelopes! The pretty things."

"I say, father," said Willy Disco; "do let me go off and try a shot at them. I'll be bound I can catch them if Silas can."

"I'm afraid to let you go, boy," said his father; "there may be Indians about—"

"I'll be careful, indeed I will, father," said the boy; "but I do hate to let them go without trying one shot. My horse is faster than any pony they've got, I'm sure."

"Well, lad, well," said the father, unwillingly. "If you'll promise not to lose sight of the train, you can go."

"All right, father!" and without waiting for more words, the youngster was off like a shot after the antelopes.

"How beautifully Will rides, father! Doesn't he?" exclaimed Rose, as the graceful lad sped over the green swells of the prairie.

"He'll only wind his horse, and never get a shot," said old Disco, with pretended gruffness, but in reality eying his youngest born with pride and fondness.

"Oh! how fast they go!" exclaimed Rose, as the antelopes, who had been approaching to gaze curiously at the wagons, suddenly started, and skimmed off over the plain like a flight of swallows.

Willy, nothing daunted, put spurs to his little horse, a remarkably fast one, and dashed after them, full speed.

Pursuer and pursued ran parallel with the wagons for some time, and finally shot out of sight ahead, the boy at last sight gamely sticking to the unequal chase.

Disco and his daughter continued to ride slowly on with the wagons, expecting soon to regain sight of Will, broken down, and halting for the wagons to come up. But, hour after hour passed; the sun began to near the horizon, and still there were no signs of Willy.

Rose grew anxious first. She had a means of information on the character of Silas that her father had not.

But she did not dare to divulge her doubts, since the name of her informant was hateful to her father. She could tell that Silas hated her brother, and knew that he would not scruple at bloodshed if he could harm him without detection.

Her mind was immensely relieved then, of her apprehensions, when she caught sight of Silas, far to the rear of the train, and coming up to their wagon, with the body of a bighorn or mountain sheep across the pommel of his saddle.

"Poor Silas!" thought generous Rose. "I wronged you, and I am sorry for it. You can not have seen Willy."

Mr. Silas Ketchum came up to the wagon at length with his game, which he hoisted in over the tail-board.

"Hallo! where's Will?" was his first salutation.

"God knows!" said old Disco, anxiously. "He went out ahead of the train this morning, after some antelopes which the foolish boy tried to run down, and we have not seen him since."

"Silas! dear Silas!" said Rose Geranium, entreatingly "you have a splendid horse. Why won't you go and look for the poor boy? He may be lost on the prairie, and starve to death, or the Indians may find him."

"Oh! no," said Silas, confidently. "There are no Indians hereabouts. They'd 'a' left sign if they had, and nary a sign have I seen. But I'll go after the boy, Rose. I'll find him for you, if his trail's anywhere. Point me out the direction he went, uncle Disco."

The old man indicated his right front, to the north-west, and away went Silas.

The Californian rode rapidly till he came to a swell of land, which he surmounted.

'Reckon I won't have to hunt far for *him*," he said to himself with a laugh, "when I know the identical spot to look, where the young fool's broken down. If 'twarn't for rousing the suspicions of these other fools I'd tell Flying Arrow to jug him right off. As it is, the benevolent preserver is a good character to make one's appearance in. So here goes for Master Will."

As he spoke, the hunter turned his horse's head away, and rode back to the rear of the long train.

The fact was that Silas knew very well where Will was having been informed by one of his Indian allies that a white boy was lost on the prairie, and wandering round in a circle. At any other time Will Disco's scalp would have been worth very little, for his horse was completely played out in the unavailing chase, and he had totally lost his direction.

But under Ketchum's advice the Indians did not show themselves, reserving their forces for the night attack.

Silas galloped on to the little motte of timber, where Willy had laid down to rest, while his tired horse cropped the rich grass.

It was not over five miles from the line of march, and yet the boy was completely bewildered, in that hopeless state of mind peculiar to lost children, old and young, large and small.

He raised a faint cheer as Silas rode up to the motte, but hung his head very sheepishly, when the latter said:

"Well, lad. You see old blower Silas is some use after

all. He's good to take my young gentleman to camp when he's lost himself; eh! Will?"

Willy didn't make any answer for some time. He was too much ashamed of himself. At last he inquired:

"Where *is* camp, Silas?"

"About five miles off," said Silas. "They were unhitching when I came away. You've made quite an excitement, young fellow."

Will didn't like his cousin. He called him a "blower" and such like irreverent terms, and he was not far wrong. But he was fain to confess that Silas had a right to blow now.

"How did you find me, Silas?" he asked, timidly.

"How does anybody find another on the plains?" said Silas, gruffly. "Following trail. If you'd had sense, you'd 'a' follered yer own till it struck the track of the wagons. But blast me, if you ain't a baby! Come, get on your moke. Let's vamoise. It's a-gettin' nigh sunset."

Willy Disco was so thoroughly humiliated by his failure, that he climbed on his horse without a word, and followed Silas. The latter was busy with speculations on his luck, and on the terrible event soon to take place.

As they neared the camp he spoke kindly to Will, and the high-spirited lad was so grateful to be spared the "chaff" he had a right to expect, that he began to think that he had wronged Silas by his suspicions. They went on, and were soon in camp, where Will was received by his father and sister with open arms.

Rose Disco, especially, was full of caresses for her lost brother, and of gratitude to Silas.

She even began to think that Herbert might be mistaken, and that jealousy of his rival might be the reason of his suspicions.

Silas played his cards well, assuming his jolliest air. He swore that he had always loved Will, and that he was glad the boy had learnt that cousin Silas was not all a blower.

"Come," he continued; "let's drown all ill-feeling to-night. We'll broach the barrel of whisky, and ask all the camp to a spree, to celebrate the finding of our lost child."

CHAPTER VII.

WIZARD AGAINST WIZARD.

AT dawn of day, the same that witnessed the losing and finding of Will Disco, the Black Wizard mounted his black steed, fully prepared for conquest, kissed Juliet good-by, bidding her keep close all day, and rode out of the narrow gorge in which his tiny camp was placed.

Herbert Sinclair was well known throughout the West, where he had accumulated a considerable fortune by his talents as a *prestidigitator*.

He had traversed California, Nevada, Utah and Colorado, made the tour of Mexico, and "coined money," as the saying is, all through the Southern States.

His whole fortune, in United States bonds, lay in the body of his elegant wagon, and yet he hesitated not to travel openly, and unarmed to all appearance, trusting to his skill as a conjurer to rid him of all scrapes.

That his weapons, such as they were, were efficacious among superstitious Indians, we have seen.

The young conjurer rode gayly along at a swift gallop, his keen eyes, acuter than an Indian's, scanning the plain at the foot of the mountains.

He saw the emigrant miners' train take its departure, himself concealed behind a clump of trees; and then, giving the rein to Sultan once more, he galloped away to the site of the Indian camp.

He well knew its position. Nothing escaped his eyes, and he had crossed Flying Arrow's trail the evening before.

He followed it now till he came to the little stream that ran out of the gorge, and saw the smoke of the lodge-fires.

As he was riding swiftly toward it, he spied Flying Arrow himself with some twenty warriors, riding forth to meet him.

The Indians came on a gallop, till they were near enough to recognize the horse and rider.

Then, with one accord, they pulled up with every appearance of terror, and fled in every direction.

Sinclair passed on as if he had not seen them, and had the satisfaction of seeing the whole party turn, at a safe distance, to gaze on the terrible wizard. But he was too near the camp now to be intercepted, and when he rode into the mouth of the gorge, he perceived that his arrival was unexpected.

He checked the pace of his horse within the last hundred yards, and rode in at a solemn and stately walk.

The Indians were lounging about the camp in the usual stolid and lazy manner of the Apache warrior, when not on the war-path. As soon as they saw the slight, elegant figure on the black horse, every man turned to look, and stood stock still as if petrified. Several of Flying Arrow's braves were in camp, and spread the rumor of the "Black Spirit's" arrival.

Sinclair rode deliberately up to the council-lodge, where the chiefs and medicine-men were standing, and gravely saluted the venerable White Bull in the Apache language, with which he was perfectly familiar.

"My father," he said, "behold the Black Wizard of the plains. He has heard that you have medicine-men among you. Let them show their mysteries, and the Black Wizard will show them greater ones. The Apaches are great warriors, and the Black Wizard will be friends with them. He will chase them no more now."

White Bull trembled before the piercing dark eyes of the conjurer. He answered :

"The Black Wizard is a great medicine-man. The Apaches are children before the great Magician of the Plains. Let him have mercy on his children, and the Apaches will be his servants and obey his word."

"It is good," said the wizard, gravely ; "I accept the homage of the chiefs. Which are the medicine-men ? Let them speak. If they can do what I can do, I will be their servant. If not, they shall be mine. Is it good ?"

"It is good," said White Bull. "Stand forth, Wise Serpent. The head medicine-man of the Apaches stands before the Black Wizard."

Sinclair turned in his saddle and surveyed the squat figure and cunning face of the Serpent. The Indian magician looked

decidedly uncomfortable. His boasts of the evening before stood him in no stead before the mesmeric glance of the Black Wizard.

Sinclair swung himself slowly from Sultan's back, and walked up to the medicine-man, fixing him with his dark, luminous eye, in his most imposing manner.

"Dog and impostor," said he, slowly, "art thou he who pretends to hear the voice of the Manitou? Is thy medicine strong enough to protect thee from mine?"

The Serpent trembled for a moment; but he recovered courage enough to say, humbly:

"The Manitou is great. The Serpent is small. But we are brothers. Let us be friends, Black Wizard."

"The man who calls the Black Wizard his brother must be able to stand the grasp of his gloved hand," said Sinclair, slowly. As he spoke, he drew from his belt a pair of long black gauntlets, and assumed them deliberately, eyeing the Serpent steadily all the while.

Then he extended his open palm to the other, saying, scornfully:

"Will my brother shake hands, or is he afraid? The man that wishes to be friends with the Black Wizard must be able to shake hands with him."

The Serpent looked round at the faces of the chiefs. Every one was looking at him with a sort of desperate hope that their champion wizard might be able to vanquish the "Black Spirit."

The medicine-man slowly put forth his hand into that of the wizard, and instantly was seized with convulsions!

He quivered and shook from head to foot; he tried to tear his hand away, but in vain. Every limb was in violent agitation, jerking and contracting with terrible force!

The Indian magician roared like a bull. He writhed and bellowed with pain, dancing and kicking, howling and trying to wrench away!

The whole circle of Indians, chiefs and medicine-men, gave a groan of terror as their only hope vanished.

With one impulse, they dropped on their knees around the terrible stranger, imploring him to pardon and release the Serpent.

Sinclair stood unmoved amidst them all for several minutes. No one dared to touch him, and he continued to watch the torments of the devoted magician with a quiet smile of contempt. At last the Indian appeared to be sinking into insensibility, his eyes rolling and his body falling to the ground.

Then at last Sinclair touched a spring in the glove, and the released savage fell senseless.

CHAPTER VIII.

FLYING ARROW.

WHEN Flying Arrow saw the Black Wizard ride past him, his first impulse was to flee. When he and his warriors had gained a safe distance, he turned and looked fearfully at the terrible horseman. He was riding straight into the Apache camp !

Flying Arrow followed slowly in his wake.

He saw the other go boldly in, to be met by the Serpent and his brother medicine-men. Then the superstitious savage uttered a sigh of relief. Like the rest of his tribe, he believed devoutly in the Serpent.

The latter was a skillful juggler enough in the rude tricks of the Indians. He was a ventriloquist of some talent in his own magic hut, and could make the voices of the spirits sound around the heads of his auditors, with good effect.

As soon as Flying Arrow saw the medicine-man coming to meet Sinclair, he called his warriors together and rode away, with his mind at ease. He had business to transact with Ketchum, in regard to the time of the meditated descent, and he had no time to spare.

He galloped away on the trail of the wagons, till his keen eye caught sight of the black tilts over the top of the swell. Then the chief turned and rode off around the hills, till he was sheltered from view of those in the wagons, and continued to dodge them all day.

About noon he met Ketchum and informed him of the

fact of Will Disco's loss. The prairie warriors had seen the lad wandering about, and several of them wanted to take his scalp, but the chief would not allow it.

"Wait," he said, in answer to the petitions of his braves. "We shall have plenty of scalps to-night, when Fork-tongue gives us the white men's camp."

When he met Ketchum, the latter was delighted with the story he told.

"It was just what I wanted, chief," he said. "I'll go and take the young fool into camp and his folks will be glad. Then we'll all have a grand drunk to-night and when they are asleep you shall come and take their scalps. Is that good?"

"It is good," replied the Indian, gravely. "Fork-tongue is a great friend to the red-men."

"Guess I am," replied Silas. "But I'm just as much of a friend to myself, Arrow. If it wasn't for that paper money that your fellows don't know the use of, you'd never get Silas Ketchum to betray his own color. It takes a good deal to buy me."

"Wagh!" returned the Indian disdainfully. "Fork-tongue talks too much. Take money and hold tongue. The Apaches will save the scalps to dry in their lodge-fires. What time to-night will the camp be asleep?"

"Listen around till you don't hear any more singing and screeching," returned Silas. "Then wait for a half an hour to let them get good and snoozing. Then come in, all of ye. But tell your men not to screech. You *might* waken some of them and there would be a fight. Just hack and stab, till there ain't a white man left there. Only remember *my* gal."

"How shall we know her?" demanded the savage.

"I'll put a mark on the wagon," replied Silas; "a black cross on the tilt near the head. Don't let a man touch it. The gal's inside the wagon."

"Good," said Flying Arrow. "The mark shall be respected. The Apache will keep faith with Fork-tongue. Let Fork-tongue beware to keep faith with them."

"I'll do it, chief," said Silas, confidently; "if I don't deliver you up this camp to-night you may skin me alive. See here! Your fellows will want to know me in the dark, so

as they won't fire at me. I'll wear a white cloth round my arm, so. I may think best to carry the gal off before the muss commences. Your fellers are hard to keep back when blood has been shed, and might forget the cross."

"They shall know of the handkerchief," said the chief. "Is Fork-tongue done?"

"Yes," said Silas, and he rode off.

Flying Arrow used him for his purpose, and showed that he despised and disliked him, all the time. As Silas rode away, he cursed the Indian chief in his heart for a proud heathen savage, and began to meditate schemes of vengeance on him in turn.

The chief remained standing where he had been left, waiting for the coming in of his braves, who were dispersed as scouts, watching the train of emigrants.

When they came in, they reported the wagons as going into camp around a pool in the prairie, five miles off, although it was quite early in the afternoon.

Flying Arrow dispatched three of his warriors in different directions, to summon to the expected feast, that night, the members of three other bands of the tribe whom he knew of as hovering in the vicinity of Florida Pass.

Then he turned and rode back to his own camp.

As the chief neared the lodges every thing was still. The whole of the population was squatted on the ground in a circle, closely packed, and in the midst of them, the chief beheld the tall, slight figure of the dreaded wizard.

He appeared to be on excellent terms with his audience, for Flying Arrow beheld no symptoms of terror, but rather of reverential admiration in the faces of the Indians.

As the band of braves approached, Sinclair raised his head and cried :

"Come boldly in, Flying Arrow, chief of the Apaches. The Black Wizard has need of thee."

CHAPTER IX.

ASTONISHING THE APACHES.

THE war-chief of the Apaches trembled at the mandate. He dismounted from his horse and came slowly up to the circle, within which his terrible master stood. He gazed upon the marble-pale face, with great dark eyes and long black mustache, in wonder, expecting every moment to see it change into the fearful black visage that he remembered two days before, wrapped in smoke and flame.

The wizard smiled at his terror and said :

"Fear not, Flying Arrow, if thy heart is clean ; but if not, tremble before me."

Flying Arrow fell on his knees before the stranger, and rattered out :

"Ask what thou wilt, Black Spirit. I will answer."

"Where hast thou been all the morning, Flying Arrow ?" demanded the wizard, sternly.

"Only on a hunt, great master," replied the chief.

"Flying Arrow speaks lies !" said Sinclair, still more sternly. "Let *this* show him that there is no escape from the wizard."

And he laid his hand on the chief's head.

"Tell the truth, Flying Arrow," he said, as the frame of the chief quivered and trembled under the galvanic current ; "tell the truth, or I hold thee in torments till thou diest."

"I will I will," groaned the tortured chief.

The wizard removed his hand and said :

"Speak, then, and tell the truth. Where wast thou ?"

"On the prairie," replied the chief, "talking to the Fork-tongue, who has promised to deliver the wagons of the white men into our hands."

"Good," said the conjurer ; "truly hast thou spoken, chief of the Apaches. What has the white traitor promised to do ?"

"To deliver the camp into our hands, sleeping," replied Flying Arrow.

"How didst thou know this man?" asked Sinclair.

"He gave us another caravan last year," said the chief. "We gave him the gold and silver, and let him escape, while we took the horses and guns."

Sinclair remained silent for a moment. This was a revelation to him.

"What are you to give him for *this* treason?" he asked, at length.

"All that the white men have in their pockets," replied Flying Arrow; "and a girl whom he is going to carry away with him."

"Good," said the wizard. "Thy heart is clean, Flying Arrow. Now hear the words of the Black Wizard. This Fork-tongue must be bound and delivered over to me, and this camp must be left alone."

There was a deep silence in the circle when the stranger laid his commands upon them. Then Flying Arrow sprung to his feet and leaped back.

A sudden idea seemed to strike him, for he called out:

"Back! all of you, my people. We will try if this great medicine-man has fooled us all."

As he spoke, the chief fitted an arrow to his bow, and drew it to the head with all his strength. The wizard stood calmly confronting him, a smile on his handsome face.

The bow-string twanged, and the arrow struck full over Sinclair's heart, with sufficient force to have driven it clear through a buffalo.

But Flying Arrow uttered a cry, and dropped his bow in astonishment, when he saw the arrow rebound with a blunted point, from the breast of the unmoved wizard. The latter caught it by the shaft as it dropped, and cast it back with a slight jerk, so that the point stuck into the naked breast of the chief and hung there. The wizard laughed scornfully.

All the Indians had sprung up, and stood around with ready weapons, anxious for his blood, upon the first sign of weakness upon his part.

But the conjurer quailed not.

"Here," he said, taking from his pocket a pistol and holding it out to Flying Arrow. "Take this pistol and aim where you please. All your bullets can not kill me."

The chief took the pistol and aimed straight at the head of the Black Wizard.

As the weapon flashed, its report was echoed by a second mocking laugh, as Sinclair, apparently, *caught the bullet in his hand*, and cast it back with stinging force at the chief's breast.

But Flying Arrow and his braves were destined to still more amazement, when the Black Wizard took back the pistol and *swallowed it*.

"Chief of the Apaches," he said, "you and all of your tribe can not kill the Black Wizard. He laughs at you and scoras you. Out of my path, or I will scatter flames of fire over your whole nation."

And as he spoke, he cast down one of the little paper shells, which exploded instantaneously, and scattered the burning petroleum around.

"Come to the camp to-night, Apaches," he finished by saying, "and ye shall see how the Black Wizard protects his own."

Without another word, he advanced through the middle of the crowd to where Sultan still stood loose and free, but docile and obedient to his motions.

One of the Indians raised his war-club as he passed, in a last effort to break the spell. Before the blow could descend, the wizard touched him with the end of his riding-whip.

The Indian fell to the earth, as if struck by lightning.

Then Sinclair slowly mounted his horse, waved his whip in adieu, and went off like a shot.

CHAPTER X.

THE GIRL BEAR-SLAYER.

WHEN Sinclair rode away over the prairie, his heart was not nearly so confident as, from his appearance, it seemed to be. He had failed to frighten the Indians from their deed of blood that night, and the war-chief's attempt on his life warned him that he had better be off while he could. **A**

shower of arrows and bullets would have put his assumed invulnerability to too severe a proof.

The secret armor he wore was a steel cuirass, but his limbs were unprotected.

Chance, and the pistol trick, had enabled him to impose upon the Indians so far, and he must trust to some other means to protect the miners' camp from their attack.

"Why don't I go there and warn them?" he thought. "But if I do, the knave Silas can outlie me. No, I'll save them, and they shall never know who did it."

And he galloped on around the spur of the mountain to his retired little nook by the pool.

On coming to the middle of the narrow passage, he was met by a strange sight. A large grizzly bear lay dead in the very center of the path, right across the wires of the overthrown fence.

The body was quite still, and Sinclair judged from that, that the circle was broken in some manner, for even corpses seem to be alive under the galvanic current.

Looking over the body of the bear, he could see little Juliet seated in her pretty camp-chair in the midst of the inclosure, placidly sewing.

"What's the matter, Juliet?" he called out. "How came this beast here?"

"Come in, Herbert," replied the child, brightly. "There's no danger. The bear's dead."

The conjurer leaped his horse high over the body of the dead bear and rode in. The plucky little girl, left all alone by herself, seemed to be utterly devoid of fear. Indians she despised, and even the dreaded king of the hills had not caused her much terror.

"I was sitting here working, Herbert," she explained, when her brother dismounted. "I heard a sort of growling, and looked up. There was that great bear smelling at the wire. When he touched it with his nose, you ought to have seen how he jumped, and how angry he got. I was afraid that he would be too big to be killed by a shock, so I didn't know what to do. He came and clawed at the wire with his paw, and it hurt him again. At last I thought of connecting the two batteries you keep in reserve with the common one. I

was just in time too. The bear had got over the fence with his forepaws in spite of the shocks, when I put the wires of the other two batteries together with this. Then he dropped. Oh! brother. You ought to have heard the poor breast roar as he writhed about. I felt so sorry for him I felt like releasing him. But I didn't dare to, he was so fierce, and so he died in less than a minute."

"Juliet," said Sinclair, admiringly, "you're a brave girl. The bravest I ever knew. Without your help I don't know what I should do."

"Who taught me?" asked the child! "Ah! Herbert, it's little I can do for you, my kind brother. But, how have you succeeded in your errand?"

"Badly, I fear," said Sinclair. "I've frightened the Indians, but when I talked to them of giving up the attack on the train, they commenced to shoot at me at once."

Juliet was alarmed.

"Heavens! Herbert. Did they hurt you?"

"No, dear. The chief shot at my breast, and struck the cuirass fair. The blow shook me a little, but that was all. Still I thought I'd better leave them, for a chance ball might have destroyed my prestige, and then I need expect but little mercy from them."

"And how are they going to attack the train?" asked Juliet.

"As I half suspected. Their chief told me all."

And Sinclair detailed to his sister the ruse by which he had obtained his information, and the astounding iniquity of Silas Ketchum. The girl shuddered and trembled.

"What shall we do?" she asked. "How can we save poor Rose and Willy from the hands of this villain?"

"I see no way but to ride into the camp and warn them," said Sinclair, slowly. "It will be a risky business. Old Disco has sworn to shoot me on sight, they say, for some reason, but I think I'll chance it."

"Shall we move, then?" she asked, rising.

"We shall have to, child. I daren't leave you here alone now, for their camp is nearly sixteen miles off. I know the spot, and I know a good hiding-place near it. We'll start at once."

So practiced were the conjurer and his little assistant in their work, and so well was every thing in that tiny encampment arranged, that inside of twenty minutes the neat little tent was packed away, with all its furniture, in the wagon.

Then that formidable battery, with its branches, which had just proved themselves capable of killing a grizzly bear, were packed away, and the carcass of the animal hauled out of the path by the grays.

In half an hour from the time that the conjurer had ridden in, he was galloping over the prairie at an easy pace, while Juliet drove the gray span after, at a spanking trot.

The little maid was an excellent charioteer. She drove on without hesitation or accident, and at sunset the pair halted in view of the white tilts of the distant wagon corral.

Sinclair turned his horse behind the shelter of a large motte, some two miles from the miners' camp. The trees were large and loaded with long, gray Spanish moss, and in the very center of the motte was a tiny pool of deep, black-looking water, which turned out to be a spring of the best kind. Sinclair was an old prairie rover, and had seen this spring before.

He proceeded to make his camp secure for Juliet at once, surrounding the motte with two lines of wires connected with the terrible battery. He felt sure that no living being, human or beast, could pass that circle. Then bidding adieu to his sister once more, and telling her to keep close, and show no light, he galloped off to the miners' camp.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ORGIE OF DRINK.

SINCLAIR rode boldly up to the miners' corral. He had taken the precaution of arming himself with a suit of concealed armor, too heavy for ordinary use, but pistol-proof from head to foot and musket-proof as regards the cuirass. He concealed in his shirt pocket a portable battery of greater strength than any he had carried hitherto, although somewhat

heavy also. Thus prepared for offense and defense, the conjurer rode up to the camp of the miners.

When he arrived there, the sun had set, and it was growing dark already.

But as Herbert Sinclair came nearer, he saw that the fires were blazing and the whole camp in an uproar. Men, women and children were running about, laughing and singing together, and Herbert realized that the "spree," promised the night before by the villain Silas, was in process of commencement.

The young conjurer rode through the opening, technically termed a "gate" by the camp, and was greeted with:

"Hello! stranger. Come and take a drink," by more than one voice.

Sinclair saw that the spree had set in, in good earnest. Not only Silas had his barrel out on the ground, but several other owners had followed the example. Everybody was fast getting drunk, for whisky flowed like water. Many were singing obscene choruses, and the very women of the camp, with their children, were more or less intoxicated.

The young man felt a sense of helplessness as he sat on his horse looking at the drunken crew.

How was he to talk reason to these sots, who had gone to work and thrown away their own reason?

While he sat looking at them, one, more drunk than the rest, approached him with a bottle.

"Come, stranger, take a drink," he hiccuped; "Didn' y' nev' see man drunk before? Try it, old hoss! 'S' th' best whisk' th' wor'd. Come! Drink!"

"I don't drink," said Herbert, coldly; "and you men had better keep sober. There are Indians around you."

"Injuns be darned!" roared the other. "Ain't I Ringtail Jim the Squealer? Who's afeer' o' th' blasted Injuns?"

"See here," said Herbert, sharply, speaking to the miners, who began to gather round; "you don't know what's going on. There's a traitor in your camp, and—"

Before he could finish the sentence a rifle cracked at a little distance off, and the next instant a bullet struck him with such force in the breast, that the young man was knocked back in his saddle by the blow.

Recovering himself with much coolness, the conjurer extended his riding-whip, and pointed to Silas Ketchum, who stood with the smoke yet curling from his rifle, beside his whisky-barrel.

"There's the traitor," he said. "He's made a plot to deliver you all to the Indians this very night."

But Sinclair's voice was not raised sufficiently to be heard by the crowd, yelling and laughing around. Silas, on the other hand, kept bellowing:

"Shoot the spy! Tear him off his horse. A greaser! A greaser!"

He had touched the right chord in the frontiersmen's hatred of Mexicans. Several of those nearest to him laid hands on the wizard with shouts of: "A spy! a spy!"

But they dropped their hold in an instant, as if they had been shot. The whole of the conjurer's armor was electrified, and the tremendous shocks received by the drunken men astonished them beyond measure. Taking advantage of the pause around him, Herbert exerted his voice and shouted:

"I am no spy! I am the Black Wizard of the Plains. All of you have seen me many a time. Listen to me!"

But there was no listen to them. They were in that frantic state when a fight is easier provoked than made up.

Men began to run to their wagons and get down their rifles.

Some yelled: "Shoot him! Shoot him!" Others, who recognized the popular conjurer, bellowed: "No! No!"

The end of it was that a free fight was inaugurated, in which fists, bludgeons, knives and pistols were freely used for several minutes, while a confusion of yells and shouts arose. Herbert wondered, in his own mind, whether the Indians were any worse than these wild devils of bordermen.

In the midst of the confusion a tremendous shout was heard, and into the *melée* leaped a gigantic form, which Herbert too well knew.

It was old George Disco, his gray hair and beard standing out like a lion's mane, his colossal figure swelling with drunken madness!

It was only too true. The old man had forgotten all his good resolutions under the insidious advice of Silas, for "only this once."

He exhibited a striking spectacle of what he might have been had he not taken to drink hopelessly.

He dashed into the midst of the fray, swinging a huge musket, clubbed, in his hands. Wherever it struck, it knocked over the burliest miners, as if they were ninepins.

He came on, bellowing out:

"Where's the murderer? Where's the man who killed his mother? Show me this Sinclair, curse him! Out of the way here!"

It was evident, that for the time being, Disco was a maniac. It was equally evident that the drunken miners were bent on a free fight.

Taking advantage of his own position outside of the immediate fight, Sinclair turned his horse, and galloped out of the gate, pursued by the yells of the frantic crowd. Several shots whistled past his ears, but he was too well mounted to fear pursuit, and in a few minutes more he was out in the prairie, where the twilight was growing dimmer every minute.

"The drunken fools!" he said, bitterly. "If I did right, I should leave them to be slaughtered when they are asleep, like hogs. But they are not responsible for this. It's that fiend Silas. I must outwit him, if I have to spend all night here. Oh! Rose! Rose! How shall I ever save you?"

While Sinclair was outside, devising plans to rescue his beloved, Master Silas Ketchum perceived that he had made a mistake in shooting. He had raised a row he could not easily quell, and it was likely to be a serious one, for several heads had been broken already, and old Disco was now surrounded by a crowd of men, shouting and cursing, and striking at him.

Silas knew of no better way to quell the row than to ply it with liquor.

"All hands come and take a drink!" he bellowed at the top of his voice, running forward with a tin canteen of the doctored whisky.

The cry was taken up by the outsiders with singular unanimity, and was the only sound perhaps that would have attracted their attention.

In a surprisingly short time, the fight was deserted, and old Disco was left by himself, dancing around and roaring out about, "The cursed juggler who killed his mother."

The rest of the crowd flocked eagerly round the barrel of drugged whisky, which Silas ladled out.

"My treat now, boys," he shouted; "no heeltaps! drink deep!"

And the mob obeyed his injunctions to the letter. They were too far gone to notice the taste of the drugs, which indeed Silas had disguised very artfully. But the effect of the opiate became manifest very quickly. One by one the howlers became stupid, and dropped off from the crowd, wandering away to their own wagons.

In half an hour, Silas stood by the empty cask, and looked around him on a silent camp. Not a being was left awake but himself and Rose and Willy Disco. The lad and his sister were cowered together in the wagon, listening to the drunken orgie outside, and most of the women and children, rough, rude Western people, were fast asleep along with the men.

Then Silas took his rifle and revolver, put them on, and started on a tour of inspection round the camp to see if any one was awake yet.

But the drugged liquid and the previous drinking had been amply sufficient. It would have taken a platoon of musketry fired in camp to have wakened those sleepers.

Silas went and saddled his horse.

CHAPTER XI.

SILAS IN TROUBLE.

NIGHT had closed over the miners' camp, when a long, dark line of men began to wind over the prairie like a serpent toward the pool by which the wagons were corraled.

They came from the east, the direction of Florida Pass. Before these men had ridden far, a second line was seen coming from the north. This line, too, was made of dark horsemen, naked to the waist and bearing long lances.

The two lines were moving on converging tracks, and promised to meet on the trail of the wagons.

They were still about ten miles from the camp, when a third line made its appearance from the south, still tending to the same point, and came steadily on.

The three bands of Apaches together numbered nearly five hundred warriors. They were moving down on a camp of a hundred men, with women and children, the whole body buried in drunken sleep.

The Apaches were well armed. The clink of firearms was frequent, and every man bore, besides, a bow and quiver of arrows.

They were going to what threatened to be a complete and unresisted massacre.

By the time these three bands were on the track, about six miles from the camp, a fourth actor appeared on the scene.

The rattle of wheels and the creak of harness announced that a wagon was coming.

It could be faintly seen, looming through the darkness, a square-topped vehicle like a grocery-wagon.

It was drawn by two light gray horses, and preceded by a cavalier.

This little wagon drove out of a motte of oaks to the north of the camp, and came rapidly down toward it. At about fifty yards from the camp it halted. All was still as death within.

The man on horseback, who was so dark from hat to hoof as to be almost invisible, rode up to the edge of the corral and looked in.

He shook his head and turned back to the wagon.

"Drive on, Juliet," he said, quietly. "We are in time to save them. They are all asleep."

The wagon drove up to the edge of the corral. The man dismounted, and took from the inside a bundle of sticks painted white, with which he went rapidly round the corral, sticking them in the ground at about ten feet from the wagons.

It took him about ten minutes, running rapidly, before these posts were all planted; and when they were, a perfect ring of stakes inclosed the corral. The man then returned to the wagon, and brought forth a large coil of fine wire, with which he ran rapidly round the corral again, passing the wire over hooks on the sticks. When he returned by the other side, a slender

fence of fine wire, no thicker than pack-thread, was drawn around the corral.

"Thank heaven ! we are through in time, Juliet," said the conjurer. "I was afraid those fellows would be down on us before we were ready."

He led the little wagon within the magic circle, and attached the ends of the wires to a machine in the interior.

By the light of a dark lantern held by Juliet, this machine presented a curious appearance. Ten or twelve flat pieces of iron, painted red, and shaped like an immense horse-shoe, or the letter U, were placed one above the other, and in front of the arms of the U a bar of steel placed on an axis, revolved when the conjurer twirled it with his finger. This bar was crooked toward the arms of the U at each end and surrounded by coils of fine wire.

"Who would think," said the wizard, looking at the magnets, "that a little girl by turning a handle could kill strong men? And yet we know it is so, Juliet. Don't we?"

"We killed the grizzly this morning, brother," said the girl. "You can leave me in here, while you find Rose. I'm not afraid of all the Indians on the plains."

In fact, Juliet, child-like, had grown to entertain an exaggerated contempt for her late foes.

Sinclair turned away, saying :

"Remember to keep turning the handle as soon as the Indians come, Juliet. Don't let them catch you napping."

"Never fear, brother," said the girl, confidently.

Then the conjurer passed down between the wheels of two of the wagons, and entered the camp. He heard nothing but snores on all sides, and saw nothing but sleepers, gathered round, by the dying light of the fires.

Herbert Sinclair frowned, and a bitter smile crossed his handsome features.

"Swine !" he muttered to himself. "If it were only for *your* sakes, I would let the Apaches come. But one angel protects ye all."

He passed lightly along among the sleepers, who so lately had been bellowing for his blood. He looked up at the silent white walls of canvas around, that surmounted the wagons.

He listened to the champing of the grass, as the horses and grazing cattle fed, *outside the corral*. The drunken miners had not set the usual guard over them. The magic ring of the electric fence surrounded the wagons alone.

"Well," muttered Herbert, as the thought struck him that the Indians might stampede the beasts; "it's no business of mine. Many men would not save their lives, even."

As he muttered the last words, he caught sight of a moving figure, against the white tilt of a wagon at the opposite side of the corral. It was that of a man leading three horses.

"Oh!" said Herbert to himself; "so that's your game, my midnight assassin, is it?"

He stooped down to the ground and watched the tall, gaunt figure of Silas Ketchum, as he led the horses up, and tied them to one of the wagons.

"What next?" thought Herbert.

Silas afforded him the required information at once. He turned away from the horses, and proceeded to a rapid and dexterous search in the clothes of all the sleepers. The conjurer rose, and came close to him without attracting any attention, so noiseless were his movements.

He could hear Silas soliloquizing as he searched:

"A good night's job this will be, Silas. Ketchum, my boy, you are in luck. These fellers all carry stamps and greenbacks. Wouldn't wonder if I had a better haul than last one. That cuss of a conjurer! Kinder reckon I made *him* hunt his hole to-night. You bet it takes old Silas to hornswaggle the wizards. Low, play-actin' cusses! *He* get little Rosey Posey! Not by a darn sight! *I'll* have her! She shall be mine, and I'll keep her just as long as I like. But that won't be long. Rosey Posey's pretty, but she'll know too much to suit me. As for that young hound, Will, I've a mind to slit his weasand now, for the sarce he's been givin' me, all these days."

As the villain uttered the last words, he arose and listened.

A long, faint, trembling whistle came from the outside of the corral, apparently.

"The signal!" said Ketchum, and he raised his fingers to his lips to respond to it.

A tremendous shock, as of a blow striking his head, made

him reel and stagger to and fro. When he was able to look around, he saw, close to him, the slight, dark figure of the young conjurer, who stood regarding him with a cold smile of contempt.

Silas uttered an oath, and put his hand on his revolver.

The Black Wizard raised his slight riding-whip, and touched him on the arm. The limb fell powerless on the instant, with the sensation of a tingling blow on the elbow.

Then Sinclair spoke, gravely and sarcastically.

"Your friends are not here yet, Silas. I made that whistle. You will be very foolish to try to shoot me. Every time I touch you, I strike you powerless. See. I touch your breast, and the blows fall like a tempest on your heart and lungs. It hurts, does it? Not half so much as the scalping to which you have doomed your sleeping comrades. I withdraw the rod. *You* have no pity till death. Your greed is insatiable. Down! Down on your knees, man, and implore pardon for your crimes!"

And the wizard touched the knees of Silas, which sunk powerless under him.

There was something terrible in the aspect of this man, so quiet, pallid and impassive, and yet who inflicted such frightful torture with a touch.

The brutal villain before him was completely cowed by the mysterious shocks. A trick on the stage he could sneer at, not understanding. But the hidden powers of nature, in the hands of a master of practical science, were beyond Silas comprehension. He trembled.

The Black Wizard held the little riding-rod over the kneeling scoundrel's head.

"Drop your arms," he said, quietly. "And I should recommend you not to try to fire."

Silas looked up, with the snarl of a beaten tiger under the lash of the tamer.

The wizard laid the lash of his taming-whip on the other's forehead.

Instantly Silas started up, with a desperate curse, and grasped at the instrument of punishment, in the hope to wrench it away.

Sinclair smiled coldly on the baffled villain, when he saw

his hands contract spasmodically over it, while throes of torture agitated his frame.

"Try it again, Silas," he said, with a low laugh. "My little whip cuts, but it doesn't do to try and catch it. Why don't you pull out a pistol, man?"

Silas was quivering and jerking from head to foot. He tried hard to keep still. Pride, rage and hate united to make him bear the torture, to avoid the scorn of his rival.

But pride, rage and hate were insufficient to hold him up against the power of the galvanic current. He broke down at last, and roared for mercy. The conjurer smiled, as he gave a turn of his wrist and twitched away the whip.

"Now will you give up your weapons?" he asked.

Silas said no more, but drew out his pistols and threw them down at the other's feet.

"Good!" said Sinclair. "Now hold out both hands, and take care not to touch me or you'll feel another dose. Hold out your hands so, behind you; that's it. Now, Master Silas, I hope you're comfortable."

He snapped a pair of delicate handcuffs on the other's wrists at the word, and Silas was a prisoner.

"You see you're not a safe man to have about, Master Silas," the wizard tranquilly continued. "Since your adventure last year, which Flying Arrow told me of—(Silas started violently)—you have made a good deal of money. I think you have several hundred dollars on you now, belonging to these gentlemen around. No, don't you try to throw it away. You can't do it. Talents like yours, Master Silas, deserve an *elevated position*. And you'll have that to-morrow morning, if rope holds. Go before me, sir."

The inexorable Sinclair drove the traitor before him to a wagon, and produced a steel chain and padlock, with which he chained the other to a wheel.

"There, Master Silas, you're safe now," he said, coolly. "And for fear you make any signals, we'll stop your mouth. Come, open it quick, or I'll open it for you."

And with a dexterity peculiar to the conjurer, he slipped a large india-rubber ball into the other's mouth, which bulged out the instant it was in, and effectually prevented any thing beyond a strange choking snore from Ketchum.

Then Herbert turned away with a tranquil heart, and proceeded to the wagon where Silas had tied the three horses. He rightly judged it to be Disco's.

He was dreadfully shocked at the sight of the old man, lying on his back on the ground, near the wagon, his gray hairs defiled with filth and dust.

"Poor Disco!" he said, audibly; "are all your fine talents only good to bring you to this? Alas, poor Rose! poor daughter! poor father!"

He had hardly spoken, when he heard a voice from under the wagon-tilt addressing him.

"Herbert! Herbert! is it you?" exclaimed Rose. "Oh, how frightened Will and I have been!"

"Come forth without fear," said Sinclair; "there is no one to hear us talk."

Will Disco put forth his head.

"Where's Silas?" he asked. "*He* was sober, I know."

"He will not trouble us to-night, Will," returned the conjuror; and he detailed to the young people the trick he had played Silas, and described to them in full the character of that worthy, as proved by the revelations made to him by Flying Arrow.

Rose was deeply shocked and pained. Her gentle heart was prone to think well of every one, and the villainy of Silas became too plain to be longer doubted.

Will Disco was by no means surprised.

"I thought he was a villain, ever since he first belied you, Herbert," said the lad.

"What did he say about me, Will?"

"He told *us* that you were a forger in California; that you had been put in State's prison there, and narrowly escaped hanging."

"Was that all?" said Herbert, laughing.

"Guess not," said Will, sagaciously. "He told father something awful about you, so bad that he won't even tell us what it was. But, he don't believe it, though. He said that if he *had*, he would have shot you long ago, Herbert, and that the bare suspicion was enough."

"Hem!" said Sinclair, musingly. "It must be a terrible thing, then. Well, let it rest. Children, you must help me

to get your father put decently to bed. It's not fit for him to die like this."

The darkness alone hid the burning blush which covered poor Rose's face, as she knelt down, with scalding tears flowing, to lift the dishonored head of her father.

The united strength of all three was required to drag the bulky frame of the old man to his couch under the wagon, and bestow him decently.

While stooping, the conjurer's eyes, glancing over the dark prairie, caught sight of the black figures of the long file of Apaches, sharply outlined against the sky.

They were riding slowly up to surround the corral, in three formidable bands.

Willy Disco caught sight of them at the same time, and uttered an exclamation of terror, in a hushed tone.

"Fear not, Will," said Sinclair, calmly. "I can protect you against all the Indians on the plains. Come, Rose, come. Will, Juliet is close by. Let us seek her."

Willy uttered a cry this time, of great terror.

"Juliet?" he cried; "sweet little Juliet? Oh, my God, Herbert Sinclair! what could you mean by bringing her here?"

The conjurer laughed.

"Come and see, boy," he said. "Juliet is going to defend you to-night."

He hurried away across the corral, to where he had left the little wagon standing. Rose and Willie followed, anxious, fearful, curious, but somehow confiding in their old friend Herbert.

They found the fantastically-costumed little maid turning the handle of the magneto-electric battery, as coolly as though the Indians were miles away.

She recognized them with a gay laugh.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WALL OF DEATH.

"HUSH!" said the conjurer, softly. "Not a word from any of you. Silence and mystery will confound the savages. Watch them."

The little party was quite hidden from sight. The wagons were corraled in the same shallow depression of the prairie which formed the pool. On the low swells around they could see the figures of the mounted Indians, looking down on the silent camp as if hesitating what to do.

The conjurer and his friends were hidden by the black body of the little vehicle. The gray horses were turned inward between two of the large wagons, so as to be hidden from sight from the outside.

"Get into the wagon, Rose," Herbert whispered. "You can help Juliet turn the wheel of the battery, if she gets tired. Will, you come with me. You can help frighten them."

Willy, boylike, was only too anxious for the honor of helping the wizard, and seeing some of the mysteries he had often wondered at.

The conjurer and his young assistant stole off behind the wagons, and disappeared.

Rose trembled when she found herself alone with little Juliet, apparently unprotected.

"Oh, Juliet!" she whispered, "are you not frightened? What's to prevent the savages from coming down on us?"

Juliet laughed.

"Every thing," said the daring child; "Herbert will frighten them rarely. You'll see, Rosey."

The girls watched the Indians narrowly.

Presently a group was formed at the top of the swell opposite them, and from the gestures of the actors it was evident that a consultation was going on.

But not a sound reached their ears.

All on a sudden one of the Indians waved his lance in the

air. Instantly as if by magic the whole body disappeared over the crest of the swell.

Then there was a long pause. Rose, watching eagerly, could see nothing more for some minutes.

Then at last the dark plumes on a warrior's crest rose over the swell and paused there.

Rose listened intently and heard a long, trembling whistle. "It was instantly answered from within the corral, and all was silent again.

Then the dark head turned on the brow of the knoll, and the Indian waved his arm. In his hand he bore a tomahawk.

Rose shuddered again.

"Oh, Juliet! aren't you afraid?"

"Not a bit," said the mite, valiantly; but her voice quivered a little.

Then she turned the handle of the electric battery with vigor, to keep up her courage.

"See," she whispered; "this machine killed a grizzly bear only this morning. We'll astonish them, Rose."

Rose made no answer, but trembled.

At that moment a row of black heads suddenly emerged over the knoll, and formed a circle all round the corral.

As quickly as they appeared, the bodies followed, on hands and knees, and again disappeared.

But in spite of the darkness, the girls knew that the Indians were on the near side of the hill.

They waited patiently and in silence, looking through the open rear of the wagon. In front of them stretched a sort of jutting fence of little white posts, out from the general circle that inclosed the corral.

It would keep the Indians at least fifty feet from the wagon.

But Rose could not yet believe that a little slight obstruction, that a child could have removed, would check five hundred savages, thirsty for blood.

She listened intently for the approach of the Indians, but not a sound met her ear. The prairie was as still as death.

"Hist!" whispered Juliet; "there they are!"

Rose strained her eyes, and caught a faint glimpse of a line

of dark forms crawling onward. One or two white head-feathers in the line enabled her to trace its progress. It was close to the edge of the projecting fence.

"Now!" said Juliet, "you'll see fun, Rosey."

The girl strained her eyes, and beheld the line in front of the white posts halt, as if in doubt; while to right and left the others crept on.

At last, one of the Indians rose slowly to his feet, and stole forward to the fence.

He paused close to it and examined it curiously. All the rest appeared to be puzzled at its appearance. Then the Indian lay down again on the earth, and stretched out his tomahawk to feel the wire. Nothing appeared to happen, only the light hatchet dropped down and the Indian lay still.

The others, as if reassured, crept on to the fence. One of them rose on his knees, and put out his hand on the wire.

Instantly he dropped on the grass, and lay without motion.

Rose trembled still more, but it was at the inexplicable power wielded by the child beside her.

The Indians in the vicinity made gestures of astonishment at the strange fate of their companions, but hardly seemed to suspect that they were dead.

Juliet Sinclair, in her eagerness to look, ceased turning the handle of the battery for a moment, and in that moment several Indians laid their hands on the fence.

The child recollected herself, and gave a quick turn of the little wheel.

In a moment there was a simultaneous cry of terror from the other Indians as those touching the fence fell back upon the grass, as if struck by lightning. And so they were.

There was a silent, awe-struck pause. Then all the Indians started to their feet with a cry of wonder, as a bright blaze of light, blue, dazzling, and unearthly, was shed over the prairie outside, till it was as light as day.

The contrast from complete darkness rendered it so much the more blinding from its intensity.

The awe-stricken savages started up, shading their eyes from the tremendous glare.

Rose could see them all round the corral, in amazement and terror, hiding their eyes and turning.

She looked on, half frightened herself at their evident terror, till she saw them fall on their knees as by one consent, their eyes fixed on some point in the air above the corral.

Fear giving place to curiosity, she looked out of the front of the little wagon to see what was the cause of the panic.

The sight that met her eyes was wonderful.

High up in the air over the corral, a little round balloon floated lightly, only retained to earth by a thread of such fineness as to be invisible.

Below the balloon hung by a wire the blazing ball of light, whose luster was so insupportable, casting a broad flood of glory downward, which covered corral and prairie for a quarter of a mile. She could see the white posts of the electric fence, that encircled the corral, and outside of that the astonished Indians.

A sprinkling of prostrate forms, here and there along the fence, told of the incautious savages who had dared to touch the wizard's wall.

The rest knelt as if fascinated, gazing at the wonderful meteor.

But Rose could also see, rising from the center of the corral, a dense cloud of white smoke.

While she looked at it, all of a sudden the light overhead glowed up in a flash, and as quickly disappeared in a shower of sparkles, with a dull, heavy puff.

The darkness that succeeded seemed terrible from the contrast. Rose felt as if she was blind.

The Indians without were even more confused, for every thing took them by surprise.

While they still knelt there, trying to distinguish objects, a fearful specter made its appearance in the midst of the corral!

It appeared to be as tall as the tallest tree that ever grew, wrapped in clouds of vapor, among which it glimmered and shook with a bluish, uncertain glare!

The face of the specter was the face of the arch enemy of mankind, with fiery eyes and jaws, and his naked body glowed with dull red and black, while his enormous bat-like wings spread out on each side far beyond the corral!

The fiendish specter hovered over them in the faint light

of his own lurid body, and the trembling Indians bowed their faces to the earth in terror and despair.

Then Rose shuddered and shrieked herself, as she beheld a dark-robed figure at least twelve feet in height, issue from between the wagons of the corral at the opposite side !

The figure appeared to shine from its own light, similarly to the colossal specter overhead. It passed out over the white posts of the fence as if it was no impediment, and stalked out among the Indians. Then it put forth its long, white arms, and a deep voice boomed forth in the Apache language, sounding like thunder itself, so deep and hollow was it.

"Go, Apaches !" thundered the dark specter ; "the master of life is displeased. See ! he stoops to devour you ! Fly !"

At the same moment the enormous figure in the clouds seemed to swoop down upon them, while a low, deep booming sound proceeded from the cloud.

The specter suddenly changed its whole appearance. The long, glimmering robe disappeared, and fell to the ground. Instead of it appeared a skeleton of fire, with legs at least eight feet long, which strode forward on the superstitious savages, brandishing a torch from which showers of fire fell every moment over the naked bodies of the warriors !

It was the last touch to their panic.

When the two frightful specters, one above, the other on earth, appeared to threaten them, the whole band of warriors fled into the prairie as fast as their legs would carry them, frantic with fear !

They did not dare to think even of carrying off the cattle and horses, herded unguarded close over the corral. The equally awful fiery skeleton pursued them with blazing torch. Its long legs outstripped their fastest warriors, and it was not till they were on their horses once more, scouring madly away, that they felt relieved.

And yet not a shot had been fired, not a sound uttered, beyond the last words of the Dark Specter. The miners still slept as quietly as though nothing had happened, and the Indians had not uttered a single cry.

The silent death of the electric fence, and the terrible ghosts painted on a little magic-lantern slide, had united together to awe the pride of the bravest Indians of the south-west.

In a few minutes after the Indians had left, the wizard took off the dress barred with flames, that had enabled him to play the fiery skeleton to such advantage, dismounted from the seven-foot stilts he had used, and walked up to the little wagon to reassure Rose.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. KETCHUM'S LITTLE GAME.

MORNING dawned on the prairie, and the miners' corral was silent still.

The sun had risen in the heavens for more than an hour before any one awoke. The horses and oxen, standing about grazing outside, or couched in the green, dewy grass, looked wonderingly at the silent wagons, amazed that their masters came not forth.

At last some of the children began to cry. The elder members of the caravan slowly woke, and rubbing their eyes sat up with aching heads. No one seemed to realize that they had been in danger, till some of the men went down to the pool to wash.

Then, first one, then the other, began shouting, and the whole camp was soon alive.

The miners awoke and ran out of the corral between the wagons to recoil, petrified with horror and astonishment.

The dead bodies of twenty-three Indians lay on the ground, face downward, all at exactly the same distance from the wagons!

The whole camp was astir and rushing out, pistol and rifle in hand, to investigate the disturbance. But, nothing else suspicious appeared in sight. The cattle and horses were feeding quietly. The prairie was empty far and wide.

Some of the miners ran up to the tops of the surrounding knolls, but nothing could be seen from there either. Every thing was as silent and still as death. The mysterious bodies seemed as if they had been dropped there from the sky.

The hunters belonging to the camp were the first to look

for tracks. Their professional pride was touched by the mystery of the thing. They felt that they must have been remiss in their duty, not to have noted Indian sign before. Still more, they had let the whole camp get drunk, and had no watch set.

While the hunters were searching the ground for tracks, some of the miners were turning over the dead bodies and searching for wounds. Not one of the bodies was found to be wounded in any manner!

While astonishment was at its height, one of the hunters came back, and announced that he had found the track of a quantity of horses over the hill, where the Indians must have been gathered.

The tracks in the grass, where they had crawled down the night before, were plainly visible, till they had reached that mysterious dead-line, where they had dropped.

Then another hunter found the narrow track of a light wagon coming toward the corral, from the north. He traced it to the edge of the corral, and back, to where it had been backed out, and turned once to the prairie.

The sharp sole and heel of a small fashionable boot appeared to have made a track all round the wagons just in front of the dead-line.

But this was all the clue afforded by any thing. The little stakes of the electric fence had left no appreciable mark in the long grass, and the mystery seemed to be deeper than ever.

While everybody was speculating on what could have happened, a shout arose from the interior of the corral. Anticipating some discovery, the whole crowd rushed in, and found one of their number gazing at the form of Silas Ketchum, who was tied fast to a wagon-wheel.

Mr. Ketchum's face was rueful enough, but positively ludicrous. His mouth was stretched wide open, to its utmost capacity and stuffed full with a large india-rubber ball which prevented his uttering a word. He was fastened to the wagon-wheel with a pair of handcuffs and a chain that took all the skill of the camp blacksmith to break, so tough were the links.

When Silas was at length relieved from his thralldom he

was completely exhausted. His throat was dry and parched, and his under jaw almost powerless. He was unable to speak, and pointed to his mouth as if imploring water.

When it was brought to him he drank a little and revived somewhat. But it was at least twenty minutes before the almost dislocated jaw could be got into sufficient command for the baffled villain to tell his tale.

When he did, it was all prepared beforehand.

Silas had possessed the advantage of being behind the scenes the night before. Had he been outside and seen the dead Indians and the mysterious light, with the horrible specters, he too would have trembled.

But he had seen Willy Disco holding the little lantern from whence the image was thrown on the smoke, and he had seen Sinclair mounting the stilts, before he sallied forth as the specter.

He therefore only felt enraged at himself for having allowed a slight-built man like Sinclair, to put handcuffs upon him and taunt him as he had.

He knew nothing of what had transpired outside. He therefore intended to make an accusation against the conjurer that should set all the camp after him.

He knew what he had done himself, and had determined to accuse Sinclair of that and worse.

"See here, fellows," he said, weakly. "You don't know who's done all this. It's that conjurin' feller as was here last night. You remember I shot at him, when we was all drunk. 'Twas 'cause I knowed him. He was a-fixin' stuff that very minute to pizen us all. Fellers, you don't know the deviltry that cuss is up to. He can stand here, and put any thing he likes into the wagons, without liftin' a finger. Don't ye mind how soon we was all throw'd asleep arter he come? 'Twere him as doctored our liquor. I swear it."

A murmur ran round the crowd.

"That's so." "We was all jolly till he came," and the like phrases ran round.

"But how came ye that a-way, Silas?" asked one of the hunters.

"I'll tell ye, fellers. I seen that conjurin' feller out on the prairie yesterday a-comin' from an Injun camp. I knowed

he'd been up to some deviltry, and when I seen him in here, I knowed what 'twar. He'd done it afore, fellers. I never told it, only to old Disco, but it's true. 'Twere him as brought the Injuns down on a carryvan last year when his own mother were thar, and every soul were scalped except him. I know 'twere him as did it, 'cause Flyin' Arrow, a chief of the 'Pashes, told me 'twere him."

An exclamation of angry astonishment and horror burst from his audience, as Silas continued :

"I knew what a scoundrel he was, fellers. I guessed what was the matter when I saw ye goin' to sleep. I hadn't drunk any of the stuff myself. I thought I'd try to wake ye up, but 'twarn't no use. And then all of a sudden, arter dark, who should come in but that same conjurer with a hull pile of Injuns. Fellers, I fit good I tell yer, but 'twarn't no use. I shot twelve Injuns with my revolvers, and two more with the old double barrel. But they took me and fastened me up to the wagon just as you see. You fellers never woke for all the firing. The Injuns wanted to kill me, but the conjurin' feller wouldn't let them. He goes and carries off Rose and Willy Disco, and he and all the Injuns leaves."

As Silas finished this wonderful tale, old Disco came forth from his bed under the wagon, rubbing his eyes. It was the first time he had waked, for his drinking had been proportionately deeper than any one else's, the night before.

Every one in the group looked at the old man curiously. The last words of Silas were full of interest.

"What the deuce are you all looking at?" demanded the old man, gruffly. "Didn't you ever see me before?"

His morning repentance and humiliation were severe, but his pride hated to be stared at.

Silas Ketchum addressed him first.

"Oh ! uncle, you don't know what's happened !"

"Ay, ay. You don't know what's happened," chorused the crowd.

"What's happened?" demanded Disco. "Nothing but what's often happened. You've all been drunk."

"Oh ! no. Worse, uncle, worse," said Silas.

"Much worse," echoed the crowd.

"We were drugged last night," said Silas.

"Drugged!" said old Disco, bewildered. "Who drugged us? What do you mean, Silas?"

"That villain, Herbert Sinclair, who murdered his mother last year to get her money," said Silas.

"Sinclair!" echoed the old man, starting. "Didn't I—I see him last night? I—I forget. Was it him?"

"Yes, it was," said Silas; "he bewitched our liquor, brought down the Indians on us, and he's carried off Rose!"

"WHAT!" thundered the old man. "ROSE! MY DAUGHTER! WHERE IS SHE?"

"Gone, uncle. Gone," said Silas. "The Indians and their friend, the conjurer, have carried her off."

The engineer turned pale, and trembled from head to foot. Then he rushed to the wagon usually occupied by Rose, and leaped on the wheel as actively as a boy. He tore open the tilt and looked in.

The bed was empty, and on the pillow lay a little white note.

But the old man hardly noticed it. He turned round and and flew at Silas, choking him up against the wagon-wheel with his immense strength.

"Villain!" he shouted. "*You* made me drink! Tell me, quick, where you have hid her? Curse you, where is she?"

It required the united efforts of a dozen strong men to get him off Silas, so thoroughly enraged was he.

"Uncle, I tell you that villain Sinclair has her," urged the alarmed Silas.

"How do you know?" bellowed the old man, dashing the struggling men from him again, and pinning the traitor.

"I saw him," yelled Silas, pale with fear.

"And you miserable coward! Why did you not kill him? What do you alive and unhurt?" cried the engineer, relaxing his grip a little, however.

"I was a bound prisoner," screamed Silas, desperately. "I shot twenty of the Indians, but they overpowered me and tied me."

The old man was actually staggered at the immense assurance of Silas. He released his hold and said:

"Are you mad? Shot twenty Indians?"

"Ay," said Silas, boldly; "and they carried off the bodies. Rose was taken away by the conjurer himself."

At this moment one of the men in the crowd, said :

"But the bodies have no wounds, and they're left outside."

This was a "facer" for Silas. He recovered very adroitly, however.

"He's covered up the wounds. It's an old trick of his. I've seen him do it in California."

"But Rose ! Where and how did she go ?" asked the bewildered father.

"She went in the black wagon of the wizard," said Silas, firmly ; "he has put a spell upon her and Willy, and they can not resist it."

"We'll see if his spells will ward off a bullet," said the old engineer, grimly. Then he looked round at the crowd of rough miners with a flaming eye. Disco drew himself up to his full height, towering like a giant over the others. His rough, gray hair and beard bristling like the mane of a lion, the old man shouted :

"Boys, how many of ye are game to follow the base skunk of a conjurer to his hole, and hang him for stealing my child ?"

"Here ! here ! Me ! me !" shouted every man in the crowd ; for the rough borderers were stirred to their inmost depths by the artful story of Silas.

"Then follow me !" cried Disco. "Get your arms and horses, every one of you, and we'll show this conjurer and murderer that our Western boys are not to be scared by any of his tricks. Be ready in five minutes, all of you."

"Hurrah for old Disco !" roared the crowd, who respected the giant for his enormous strength, as crowds do.

The old man went to his wagon, and picked up his rifle and pistols. To his surprise, he found his own horse standing saddled by the wagon-wheel, along with Willy's little pony. But Silas Ketchum's splendid steed, which had been the third member of the trio, was nowhere to be found, in camp or corral.

When at last the miners were ready to start, Silas was forced to content himself with the pony.

A small camp-guard was established to protect the wagons, and the rest of the party, at least a hundred strong, heavily armed, desperate frontiersmen, rode out of the corral on the track of the wizard's wagon.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WIZARD'S CASTLE.

IN advance of the party rode Disco himself, on his heavy powerful horse, carrying in his hand a long, heavy, breech loading rifle. The old man's face was white, and set with fury and resolve. He had heard from Silas every thing that was horrible concerning Sinclair.

True or false as his statements might be, this, at least, was true: his daughter was gone.

The strange wheel-tracks, so different from any in camp, coming toward it, and going away in the night, the dead bodies, bound Silas, every thing presented a deep mystery to him, out of which only one thing shone clear: his daughter was gone.

As he rode on, with his eyes bent on the track, he suddenly remembered the white note which he had mechanically taken from the girl's pillow, and thrust in his bosom without reading.

It might contain a solution of the mystery.

He took it out, tore it open, and read as follows:

"DEAR, DEAR FATHER--Do not think I have left you forever. I am not gone far. Willy is with me. Father, I have gone with Herbert Sinclair, whom I have promised to marry. You think him bad, father, but he has been belied by Silas, who this very night tried to murder us all. Father, Herbert has saved all our lives from a band of ferocious Indians, this very night. If it had not been for him, you and every soul in camp would have been murdered. Herbert has asked me to come with him to-night, and wait for you to come for me. He says that he will not venture his life among those wicked men in camp, who tried to kill him last night when he warned them of danger. Father, I owe it to him to come, and Willy has come with me. You can come to us, but Herbert says that he *must* speak to you fairly, and face to face, without being shot at before hearing him.

"Father, for my sake, *speak to him*. Don't try to murder him without a hearing. Your loving daughter,

"ROSE DISCO."

The old man crushed the letter thoughtfully in his hand as he rode on. The voice of *reason* began to make itself heard. After all, the pistol is not an infallible argument. A man may be dead, and *right*. Another may be alive, and *wrong*.

Disco began to think over his daughter's letter as he went. He knew Rose to be the soul of truth. He had more than once suspected Silas of lying. Which was right now? Silas, who accused Herbert, or Rose, who accused Silas? The old engineer began to feel very shaky in his mind on certain points of faith. Had he not read that letter, the first intimation Herbert would have received of his advent would have been a volley of rifle-shots. As it was, he rode on in gloomy silence, following the track of the wheels, and debating in his mind what to do.

The wheel-track was sharp and distinct. The tracks of two horses alongside were equally clear. Silas Ketchum recognized the print of his own broad horse-shoe, and pointed it out to the miners with a curse.

The men rode on, jesting about what they were going to do with the horse-thief, when they caught him.

The crime of horse-stealing is one so peculiarly atrocious, in the eyes of frontiersmen, that Silas felt secure that his enemy would have short shrift when he was found.

His heart filled with ferocious joy, as he looked at the band of rough, desperate men that followed him, Silas urged on the little pony, still tired from its race the day before.

"Never mind, little hoss," he muttered, as he dug the spurs into the panting beast. "We'll catch the cuss, and then you shall have rest."

That they were approaching the conjurer's retreat became evident. The wheel-tracks swept around in a great circle on the prairie, centering in the beautiful motte of live-oak trees, that has been already described.

Ketchum set the example of leaving the track and riding straight toward this motte, and uttered a shout of triumph as he pointed out to the borderers the two gray horses feeding tranquilly among the trees.

Old Disco put spurs to his horse and galloped down ahead of the party, who followed in a wild mob, shouting in triumph.

They would have dashed in headlong, but for one thing. The engineer exerted his tremendous voice to bring them to a halt within a hundred feet of the trees.

The miners obeyed Disco instinctively. They felt that his was the wrong, his the right to prescribe vengeance.

Silas Ketchum alone, fearing investigation, and anxious to rush the thing through with that wild mob rage that has so often disgraced Lynch law, rode on, roaring :

"Death to the thief! Lynch him! lynch him!"

Many of the men were anxious to follow, but old Disco sat on his horse before them, shouting :

"Keep back, I tell ye, boys. I want to speak, and I've a right to be heard."

"Keep still, fellers. Let's hear what he's got to say," cried several voices.

Silas, galloping valiantly on, perceived that he was alone, and with a curse of rage, pulled up and came back.

He found Disco addressing the miners.

"Boys," he said, "my daughter has left me; but she has left a letter too, in which she says that she has gone willingly with this man."

There was a blank silence at this. Disco went on :

"We are strong enough to give fair play to every man, are we not?"

"Yes, yes!"

And a grunt of qualified assent went forth from the speakers.

"We don't want to hang the wrong man, do we?"

"No, no!" But the lowering looks of the men gave token that they were determined to hang *some one*.

In Lynch law, blind vengeance too often takes the place of justice. Still, justice appeals very powerfully in the West, when its voice is distinctly heard.

Silas Ketchum came up, and heard the last words. He turned pale, and interrupted his uncle.

"Why, uncle Disco," he said, "what are you talking about? Didn't I see the villain bring in the Indians?"

The old man turned on him sharply.

"Wait till you're spoken to, Silas. I'm captain of this job."

Silas turned pale and said nothing, for the keen blue eyes

of the old man was surveying him with a glance more searching than pleasant.

By this time the passion of the miners had cooled. The evident disagreement between Silas and his uncle tended to raise doubts as to the real state of the case.

Old Disco resumed.

"I hardly know what to think, boys. I'm in such a maze of doubt, I can hardly see my way. Here's my nephew Silas, who has all along accused this Sinclair of giving up the mother that bore him to the Indians to be slaughtered, that he might inherit her money. He also accuses him of bringing down Indians to steal my daughter last night. On the other hand, my daughter's letter accuses Silas of the same thing. Which is true?"

There was another blank silence. At last one old miner suggested:

"Let's find out."

"That's what we must do," said the engineer, gravely.

But here Silas screamed out.

"The letter's a forgery. He wrote it. I saw him."

"You saw a good deal, Silas," said Disco, dryly. "Come, boys; we waste time. Forward."

The party turned their horses toward the motte, which had been perfectly silent all the time. The two gray horses were feeding quietly near the edge, but nothing was to be seen of the wagon for the deep fringe of moss that hung from the trees.

As they rode in they were astonished to perceive, outside of the motte and encircling it, a wire fence about five feet in height and of three wires on slender white posts.

The borderers halted in perplexity before it. One of them suggested, with a laugh, that the conjuring fellow was going to set up a farm.

"Don't break his fences," called out another, as Silas rode toward the slender barrier.

But before he could touch it, as he had intended, he saw fit to change his intention.

A large dog, belonging to one of the miners, went bounding ahead of the party and started to wriggle through between the wires. But no sooner did his nose touch it, than

the beast dropped dead on the turf without a struggle in face of the whole party.

Silas recoiled as if he had been shot, and pulled at his pony with desperate haste. The miners halted, and gazed at the mysterious fence in awe and fear.

Old Disco was the only man who understood it.

"Keep away from the fence," he cried, warningly. "It's an electric wire. Ride round this way. There's an opening somewhere, be sure."

This mysterious check, so feeble in appearance, so terrible in effect, had its share in sobering down the ferocity of the miners. A man able to take care of himself is more apt to meet with justice in any part of the world than the feeble and defenseless. The amateur Vigilance Committee began to think more seriously of what they were doing, now that it promised difficulties.

They rode around the motte, till they spied the track of wagon-wheels entering it. There they found that a narrow road divided the fence which ran on each side of it.

Old Disco turned his horse and rode boldly up this narrow lane, and one or two of his followers came after him in single file.

But the great majority of them were afraid to venture in, where the bolt of a skittish horse would entail death by lightning on the instant.

When the engineer arrived at the little open space in the motte, and beheld the conjurer's wagon drawn up there, with the wires terminating therein, he was left alone on his horse. His companions had not dared to trust themselves there.

The first person that the engineer saw was his own daughter, Rose, seated in a camp arm-chair, talking to little Juliet, still in the rich fantastic costume of her brother's assistant.

At a little distance off stood the slight, elegant figure of the conjurer, with his arms folded, looking at the girls, while Willy Disco was busily reading a book of Natural Philosophy.

Disco's heart gave a great throb of joy at the sight of his children safe, but he spoke sternly, as Rose looked up and started to her feet.

"So, girl," he said. "And so this is your obedience to your father, your love and duty, is it?"

Poor Rose hung her head and blushed deeply. She could make no reply.

Herbert Sinclair walked quietly forward, till he stood by the slight barrier, before which the engineer had checked his horse.

"It was necessary, Mr. Disco," he said, calmly. "When I entered your camp last night to warn your people of danger, I was fired on. I induced Miss Disco to come here after I had saved your camp from five hundred Apaches, some of whose bodies you found outside this morning. If you had given me the rights of a gentleman before this, there would have been no trouble. But you chose to listen to a cowardly calumniator instead, and threatened to shoot me on sight, for Heaven knows what."

"Did that give you a right to steal my daughter, young man?" asked Disco, with a sort of grim humor in his tone. He did not look by any means as angry as he might. The young man's quiet determination compelled his respect.

"Perhaps not," said Herbert; "but, when I remember that your camp still lay open to attack after I left; that Indians were around, and that the only man in camp, sober, was the villain who had lured them to massacre you all, the temptation was great to keep a hostage who might insure me a civil hearing."

"Humph!" growled Disco. "You've got one, anyhow. Tell me what you want."

"I want to know what you accuse me of, and who is your informant," said Herbert, proudly. "I want to see the villain Silas set face to face with me before you all, and a fair trial to be given to us. I accept Lynch law itself, if you will give me your word to abide by the truth and justice."

"It shall be done," said Disco, gravely. "I pledge you the word of a Virginia gentleman to give you a fair hearing, if you will submit your case to our camp. You say that Silas brought the Indians down on us. He accuses you of the same thing. Whose word is to be taken?"

"Neither," said Herbert, calmly. "I can prove every word I say. He can not."

"Be it so," said Disco. "What do you propose to do?"

"If you can promise me fair play from your comrades,"

said Herbert, "I will come out of my fortification. But if they are as crazy as they were last night, I shall have no chance of being listened to."

"You are right," said Disco. "I will go and tell them what you propose, and bring their answer."

He turned his horse and rode out on the prairie. He found the miners excited under the eloquence of Silas, who was trying to persuade them to fire a volley down the lane.

The engineer stopped this at once.

"Fools!" he said; "if you do it you will kill my daughter. I have seen her and Willy, and both of them are safe. I have promised Sinclair a fair trial before you. He will not come out unless you promise not to shoot him till judgment is pronounced. Will you give him fair play?"

"Yes," assented the crowd, with one voice.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE TRIAL.

WHEN Disco returned to the wizard's camp, and announced the decision of the miners, Sinclair bowed his assent to the trial.

Going to the wagon he disconnected the battery at once, and threw down a panel of the fence.

Then he and his young guests walked out together, on foot and unarmed, to meet the lynchers.

They found the crowd of horsemen dismounted, and waiting in a large circle for them; and the groan which greeted Herbert, proved that his enemy had been at work again.

But as Rose Disco, with an intuitive perception of her cousin's treacherous nature, had anticipated this, the girl had taken the most effective method to prevent violence. She walked beside him, leaning on his arm.

The rough borderers, who would have murdered the man, respected the woman.

But, Silas Ketchum had no such respect of persons. See

ing only that his opportunity for vengeance was come, the miscreant drew his revolver and advanced on Sinclair, crying :

"Where's my horse you stole?"

The cry was artfully raised, to gain sympathy for the act he was about to perform.

Leveling the pistol at Sinclair's breast, he fired full into it, at six feet distance.

Rose shrieked, and Herbert staggered for an instant, but the good cuirass saved him. Before the other could repeat the shot, old Disco rode him down with an oath whose profanity will be excused, we hope, and wrenching the pistol from him, roared :

"Blame your horse! Let the trial go on, sir."

The other miners experienced a quick revulsion of feeling at the treacherous shot. They applauded old Disco, and hissed Silas for being too anxious.

Willy Disco, with little Juliet on his arm, stepped out and said :

"I have your horse, Silas. I took it to prevent your escape on it. When these gentlemen know all, they'll say I did right, too."

The boy's words created a decided sensation.

Old Disco opened the proceedings by saying :

"See here, boys. It's no use wasting time palavering. Let's elect a jury of twelve honest men at once, and have this thing rushed through. Take away Ketchum's pistols. It's not fair to let him have them, when the conjurer's unarmed."

The order was complied with in a few minutes. A jury was chosen, of married men, and old Disco was unanimously appointed judge. He made a good one.

"Come to order," he said. "Take seats on the ground all of you. Gentlemen of the jury, you sit here. Now then, Silas Ketchum, stand forth and tell us what you know about last night's business."

Thus adjured, Master Silas stepped forward, with a downcast air, to tell his farrago of lies.

"All I've got to say is this," he said. "This here feller, this Sinclair, was in a carryvan last year, along with me and some other fellers. His mother was along, and the old lady

had a pile of money, that his daddy left her. To get this money, this Sinclair had the whole carryvan murdered by Injuns, and I was the only one to escape."

Every one looked at Sinclair, to see how he took the accusation. The conjurer said not a single word, but waited with his arms folded, a calm smile on his pallid face.

"Well?" said Silas, roughly; "what do you say to that?"

"Is that all your accusation?" asked Herbert.

"Not by a long sight. I seen ye yesterday comin' out of the 'Pash camp at Florida Pass."

"At what time?" asked Herbert, quietly.

"Don't know. Don't carry a watch. 'Bout noon I should say. Fellers, I saw this coon comin' from there, and I thought there was mischief up. Well, last night you know we had a spree in honor of Will being saved, and we saw this cuss come into camp. You know what followed. He doctored our liquor with his cursed conjurin' tricks. I wouldn't drink and so I kept sober. This feller brought in the Injuns arter dark and carried off Rose Disco while his friends ironed me to the wagon. He stole my hoss, too, and I demand that you hang him for what he's done. I saw him with my own eyes."

When Silas had done, there was a dead silence, and angry eyes were fixed on Sinclair.

As if by an afterthought the artful villain put in:

"You see he must be a scoundrel, or he wouldn't wear steel clothes under his own. You saw my bullet hit him square in the chest. What business has an honest man with them devilish tricks?"

The thrust was well aimed, and an ominous murmur went round the circle. Old Disco checked it in time.

"Silence in court!" he cried. "Give the man fair play. We've only heard one side, yet."

Herbert Sinclair spoke next.

"Is that all you have to say against me?" he asked.

"Ain't that enough?" cried Silas. "You ought to be hung without trial, you cursed murderer and horse-thief."

"Am I allowed to speak now, judge?" asked Sinclair.

"Yes," said Disco; "and now, boys, let me tell you one thing. Don't let Silas interrupt this man, till he's through. He's been quiet enough, you'll all own, I think."

"Ay, ay. That's so. Good enough," were the comments of the borderers.

Sinclair stepped forward to the center of the circle and spoke:

"Gentlemen," he said, "most of you know me. You've seen me all around the West. If I play tricks I play them openly, and it's for you to find them out. I use common secrets of natural philosophy, which any of you might learn if you took the trouble. You are surprised at many things which I will explain to you, so that there is no mystery.

"Now to the accusations.

"This man accuses me of bringing Indians to your camp, and drugging your liquor. I will *prove* to you by *witnesses*, not by my own words, that he himself drugged the whole of the barrel of whisky in his own wagon. You'll find some of the laudanum in the dregs, I doubt not."

Silas burst in here.

"It's an infernal lie, boys. I—"

"Silence!" shouted old Disco. "One at a time."

"I won't stand still and hear him take away my character," shrieked Silas. "Lynch the cursed horse-thief, boys! Lynch him!"

But no one stirred, and Silas was forced to stand still, and glared with impotent rage at the conjurer.

"See here," said old Disco, gruffly; "we've had quite enough of this. You've been pretty hard on this fellow's character yourself, Silas. Now leave him alone till *he's* through."

Herbert waited till the disturbance was over, when he resumed:

"You can examine the barrels as to the drugging, and Miss Rose Disco shall tell what she saw, the night before last, when I was in your camp in disguise. This Silas took me for one of you, and asked me to keep watch outside the wagon while he drew some whisky. Instead of that I woke Miss Rose, who slept in the forepart of the wagon. We both peeped in, and saw Silas pour something into the barrel from a bottle, which he took from his chest. You can search the chest and ask Miss Rose here. I don't expect my word to be taken for more than it's worth."

"Listen to the villain!" cried Silas. "He confesses that he was in our camp in disguise, in a red beard, cuss him! He ought to be hung at once. What's the use of more talk?"

"Stop!" suddenly cried Herbert; "how do you know I had a red beard on?"

"Didn't ye say so?" stammered Silas, taken aback.

"You heard me, gentlemen," cried the young conjurer. "The man knew how I was disguised and admits it. I said no word about a red beard. Shall I call Miss Disco? She shall corroborate my words."

A movement of interest decidedly favorable to Herbert set in, as Rose Disco walked forward and spoke in her clear young voice.

"It's all true, gentlemen. I did see Silas pour in something from a bottle. Mr. Sinclair told me that he had drugged the liquor, and was going to bring the Indians on us; but I thought him mistaken, till last night."

Old Disco now addressed Herbert.

"What were you doing in our camp, young man?" he asked, sternly.

"Do I address the judge or Mr. Disco?" asked Herbert.

The old man felt the appeal to his sense of justice.

"To the judge," he answered, gravely.

"I came to speak to Miss Disco," said Herbert, boldly. "I loved her and she loved me. When we met at Staunton you were not too proud to let your daughter speak to the conjurer. But, some one belied me behind my back, and you know yourself, Mr. Disco, that you gave me no opportunity of clearing myself. You sent me word only that you would shoot me on sight, if I came near your daughter."

"Well, gentlemen, what can a man do then? You all of you know enough of love to sympathize with me in trying to see the girl I loved. Is it not so?"

He had touched the right chord at last.

"Good! good!" cried several in the crowd.

Omnipotent love never pleads in vain.

Old Disco said nothing. A grim smile, instantly smothered, evinced the fact that he was not very angry. Artful little Rose took advantage of the gleam of light and crept close to her father's side.

Silas began to look pale and uneasy. His schemes were abortive, and he began to see it, and to think of escape.

"So much for the drugging," said Herbert; "now for the Indians. Gentlemen, how many dead bodies did you find round your camp this morning?"

"Twenty-three," answered Disco.

"Was there any mark of violence on them?"

"No! no," cried the crowd, eager to solve the mystery.

"Gentlemen, *who killed them?*" asked Sinclair.

There was a blank pause.

One man cried out:

"Silas Ketchum says he shot 'em."

Sinclair laughed aloud.

"One man kill twenty-three Indians? Where are the bullet-holes?"

"There were none," said Disco, gravely.

"Gentlemen, I'll tell you who killed them. This child here."

And he laid his hand on Juliet's head.

There was a roar of laughter.

"You do not believe it?" said Herbert. "It is only partially true. I will explain. I came to your camp last night to warn you of danger from the Indians. You drove me off without hearing me. I had heard from Flying Arrow, the Apache chief, that he had engaged with Silas Ketchum to murder you all, and give him, Silas, your money. I frightened the Apaches with my tricks, and tried to get them to give up the plan, but they shot arrows at me, and all my tricks would not have saved my life in another minute.

"Well, you drove me away. Most men would have let you be killed. I saved your lives for the sake of this little girl here, and only that.

"I came at night when you were asleep and drunk, all of you, with Silas Ketchum's drugged liquor. I set up that same light fence of wires which I always use on the prairie to defend myself from assault by the Indians or wild beasts. I surrounded your wagons with it, and put on the full force of an electric battery, strong enough to kill the biggest buffalo on the plains. This little girl worked the battery. Now, do you understand what I meant when I said she killed the Indians?"

There was a movement of intense interest.

The conjurer went on ;

"After I had made you secure—you men who had tried to kill me last night, remember—I went inside the corral and found you all asleep, and Silas Ketchum at work emptying your pockets. If you search him now, you'll find some of your money on him."

At this everybody began to feel in their pockets, and a rush was made at Silas. The villain screamed :

"He put it there ! Indeed he did, gentlemen." But the miners had used him pretty roughly before Herbert and Disco together, could quell the disturbance. The wizard parted the crowd with ease.

He walked up with his light riding-whip and delivered shocks with such generous profusion that a wide circle was formed around him in a moment.

"Hear me out !" cried Herbert. "Let us both have our say and let justice be done."

The respect inspired by the electric shocks, more than any notion of justice, quelled the crowd.

"Now then, listen," said the conjurer. "You have felt the force of this whip. With that I quelled Silas, took away his arms, and ironed him to the wheel, single-handed. I sought no aid to conquer living man. The power of electricity is sufficient for me.

"I found Miss Rose Disco and her brother Will both frightened to death at the drunken orgie that had been going on around them, and the fear of the Indians frightened them still more.

"I took Miss Rose to my wagon, to my sister Juliet ; and her brother Willy helped me to scare the Indians. They crept down to the camp and some of them touched the electric fence in the dark. Those who did were killed. So much for the dead bodies.

"I made a great smoke in the center of the corral and threw an image of a terrible ghost on it from a magic lantern.

"Will Disco held the lantern while I went out and frightened the Apaches with a second ghost on stilts. They were so frightened that they ran as hard as they could go, and they'll never trouble your corral again.

"That's the whole story of last night's mystery. You can examine Mr. Disco's children if you please, or you can ask Silas Ketchum himself, on one condition."

"What is that?" asked old Disco.

"That he answers all questions from the *chair of truth*," answered the wizard.

"What do you mean?" asked the engineer. "What is the chair of truth?"

"Willy," said the conjurer, "go and bring it, my boy."

The lad ran off with alacrity to obey the mandate.

Will Disco's ambition was elated with the glimpses he was getting into the conjurer's mysteries.

While he was gone, Herbert turned to the now eager and much interested crowd.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am about to show you a very remarkable chair. Whoever sits in it must tell the truth, for the power of the chair will not suffer a liar in it. You look astonished, but I will prove it to you. Here it is."

As he spoke, Willy Disco appeared, carrying a small arm-chair, soft and cushioned with thick, soft pillows to all appearance. The legs were very thick and solid, and apparently of *glass*.

Sinclair took the chair from the boy and carried it into the middle of the circle, where he set it upon a flat rock.

"Gentlemen," he said. "You have heard Silas Ketchum's story and mine. Both remain to be *proved*. I will let all my witnesses sit in that chair while they testify, and Silas must do the same with his. Is that fair and square? All we want is *the truth*, not who can tell most lies about the other."

"That's fair." "That's right." "Good enough!" cried the crowd. But Silas said nothing.

The wizard spoke out again:

"Whoever accuses first has the first witness," he said. "Silas Ketchum, who are your witnesses? You accuse me of murdering my mother, and of horse-stealing. Call your witnesses!"

Silas raised his face to the crowd. It was pale enough now, and his lips quivered nervously.

"I'm my own witness," he said, doggedly. "This fellow ~~has~~ bewitched the Discos. It's all a pack of lies he's told."

"Call your witnesses to your own truth, Silas," said old Disco, sternly. "Things look black against you."

"I tell you I'm my own witness," said Silas, in a surly tone.

"Then take the chair," said the conjurer, "and tell your story."

"I won't get into no such devilish chair," said Silas. "How do I know but he's going to kill me in the cursed thing."

"You can see that there is no danger in the chair," said Herbert. "Willy, sit down, boy. The people shall see there is nothing wrong in it."

Willy Disco took his seat and threw himself back on the chair, and nothing came of it. At the conjurer's request, Rose and Juliet, the judge and each member of the jury tried it successively, and nothing whatever happened. It creaked a little under old Disco's great weight, but that was all.

There was no excuse for Silas. Reluctantly and pale, he took his seat.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CHAIR OF TRUTH.

WHEN Silas Ketchum took his seat there was a dead silence.

The wizard advanced to him, and fixed him with his glittering eye, and everybody looked anxiously at Silas. He sat there quiet and still, looking up at Sinclair, but nothing happened.

The people were somewhat disappointed, it must be confessed. The money found on Silas, and his evident perturbation, had turned the tide of public opinion against him. Every one expected to see something awful happen when the known liar took the chair of truth.

But nothing occurred till Sinclair spoke.

"Silas Ketchum," he said, quietly and distinctly, "how

much money did you get last year, when you sold the train to the Indians?"

"It's a lie," said Silas. "I never sold no— AH-H-H!"

He ended in a shrill howl of agony, as he tried to rise from the chair, on whose arms his hands were resting. In vain. Some unseen power seemed to pin him there as he kicked, struggled and bellowed, in a vain endeavor to free himself, wrenching the chair from the ground a few inches, but unable to prevent its sinking back, while he writhed with some terrible and mysterious torture.

The miners all uttered a sigh of approval. There is nothing so pleasing to the average mind as the detection of fraud and the reward of virtue.

"Give it to him, Truth!" shouted one rough fellow. "It's time he got it, the ornery cuss!"

Meantime, Silas writhed, yelled, and struggled in vain. At last, overcome with torture, he shrieked out:

"Let me go! I'll tell all! *I got over ten thousand dollars, and I spent it all.* AH-H-H-H!"

He finished with a yell, and sunk back into the chair exhausted.

The wizard smiled.

"You see he has told the truth. The chair torments him no longer, gentlemen. It is a wonderful chair. If every man had such a chair, he'd never hear a lie, all the year round."

The miners gazed at the wonderful chair in a sort of consternation. Silas, released from pain, was still unable to rise, for the wizard stood before the chair with the terrible whip raised, and the villain did not dare to face it.

"Now, Master Silas," pursued the conjurer, "tell us *whose* mother it was who was murdered by the Indians at your instigation."

"I don't know," said Silas, sullenly. "I swear I don't— No—don't—don't— AH!"

And the torture recommenced.

"MINE! MINE!" yelled the guilty wretch, as the current of electricity again reached every fiber. "Take away the torture! I'll tell all! *It was my own mother! I stabbed her myself!*"

"I thought as much, gentlemen," said the wizard, calmly

"Such an accusation was too horrible to be all invention. He has charged me with his own crimes!"

The miners looked panic-stricken at the Californian, who lay back exhausted in the chair of truth. Such horrible revelations astounded the most hardened frontiersman among them.

"Now, gentlemen," continued the wizard, "let any of you ask him who invited the Indians down last night. I need call no witnesses."

Old Disco advanced to his nephew. His own face was pale with emotion at the awful revelations.

"Silas," he said, in a deep, hollow voice, "did you really kill your own mother, my sister?"

Silas cowered and hid his face.

"I did," he muttered. "I own it all. Spare me!"

"Who brought the Indians down last night?" asked the old man, sternly.

"I did," muttered Silas.

"What for?"

"I loved Rose, and I hated Will. And you all had so much money," gasped the trembling wretch, cowering under the pitiless circle of eyes that surrounded him.

"And your accusations against Herbert Sinclair—are they true or false?"

"False," whispered Silas.

"It is enough, gentlemen," said Disco, solemnly. "We have heard all. Are there any of you here who think that Sinclair is worthy of death?"

"No, no! Silas! Silas!" cried several voices.

"Gentlemen," said the judge, "do I understand you to say that this Silas is worthy of death?"

There was a deep silence.

The character of the scene had changed, from the fierce vengeance of a mob, to the feeling of the awful responsibility of administering inflexible justice.

Not a man of the circle dared to speak.

Disco broke the silence and repeated the question.

"Yes!" came a deep, sullen murmur from the miners.

"Silas Ketchum," said Disco, solemnly, "you have had a fair trial, and your mother's brother has been the judge. In

the name of that mother, I pronounce you worthy of death. Let justice take its course, and may God have mercy on your soul."

Herbert Sinclair beckoned to Willy, and whispered to him. The lad drew away Rose and Juliet from the scene. Silas was left alone with his judges.

CHAPTER XVII.

JUSTICE.

WHEN the girls had disappeared, and not before, the old engineer advanced and laid his hand upon the shoulder of Silas.

The craven villain started from the chair and fell on his knees.

"Oh, uncle Disco!" he shrieked, "don't let them kill me. Life is so sweet to me. Don't kill your own nephew. Gentlemen, gentlemen, give me up to the law, but don't murder me! You've no right to murder me. I should never have been convicted in a court of law. There's no proof against me but my own ravings. I was mad. I take it all back. I did not do murder. Ask—"

He stopped, and his jaw fell, as he gazed with horror on the figure of Flying Arrow, the Apache chief, who at this moment stalked out of the motte in full war-paint, but unarmed.

"You want a witness," said Sinclair, sternly. "Here is your accomplice. He and his tribe came to my tent at dawn to crave forgiveness of me for trying to murder my friends. Their whole force is on the other side of that motte."

There was a hurried movement of alarm, and a seizing of weapons among the whites at the news.

"Fear not," said Herbert. "Not one Indian will dare to lay his hand on you. I took all the fight out of them last night. Speak, Flying Arrow, and tell the whites what you know of this villain."

Flying Arrow's face assumed a strong expression of disgust as he pointed at Silas.

"Fork-tongue much heap coward," he growled. "Come promise give wagons to Injuns, same as last year. Injuns glad to get wagons. Get powder; get whisky; get much heap horses and oxen. Promise Fork-tongue much heap paper money. Injun no like him. Fork-tongue liar and coward. He fear to die. Flying Arrow no fear. Me no squaw. See here. Me no tremble. Shoot at me. Me no fear. Me big good man. Fork-tongue dog. Fork-tongue coward."

And he spit upon the kneeling Silas with every mark of scorn.

"Oh, gentlemen!" whined Silas, "you won't take an Injun's word against me, will you? He lies! Indeed he does!"

"See here," interrupted the Indian, roughly, "too much heap talk. Squaw! dog! coward! die like man! You got to die. *So has me.*"

There was a movement of interest in the circle.

"It is true," said the conjurer. "The Apaches have given up Flying Arrow to your justice for the attempt on the train. You can hang him if you wish. Justice must be done on red and white alike."

"Good!" shouted a borderer. "Good enough for you. Hang 'em both."

"Oh! give me a chance for my life," yelled Silas. "Let me fight the Indian."

The idea struck the minds of the people as such whimsical ideas will. The bait took.

"Give 'em knives and strip 'em," was the cry. "Let the cusses rip at each other."

It gained so much force that Disco was fain to yield to it, and in a twinkling the upper garments of Silas were torn off, and, stripped to the waist, he was set opposite to the Indian.

Knives were put into the men's hands at ten paces from each other, and the rough borderers made a ring, and encouraged them to fight. The survivor was to have his life for victory.

Silas and the Indian crept toward each other. They were a close match in hight, but the chief was the heavier.

Like two tigers watching for a spring, the two murderers, white and red, crept round each other.

The Indian's eyes glowed like burning coals, and Silas glared like a hungry wolf.

At last, when the spectators began to hiss at the delay, the Californian suddenly leaped on the Indian and made a straight thrust for his side.

The active savage caught the wrist of his assailant, but not in time to prevent a broad, deep gash in his side.

With a yell of rage he struck at Silas and kept on cutting and slashing like a fiend incarnate. The borderer writhed and struggled to wrench his hand away, and failing that, to catch his opponent's wrist. He succeeded in this, and the two commenced to wrestle for the mastery.

Silas got his wrist free as he lay undermost, in the struggle, and plunged his broad blade in the Indian's bowels.

Flying Arrow ground his teeth, and with a desperate exertion of strength got his hand free, pinned the other to the earth, and stabbed at him.

The stabs were terrific. Any one was mortal. But the desperate Indian continued to hack away at the fallen borderer even after life was extinct.

Then, staggering to his feet, dizzy with his own horrible wounds, from one of which the entrails protruded, he cried :

"Me big good man!" and yelled out his last war-whoop.

Even in the act, he fell dying on the body of his opponent.

There is but little to be added to our story now. Herbert Sinclair's innocence established by the unwilling confession of Silas, old Disco was no longer averse to the conjurer.

"See here, Mr. Disco," said Sinclair, as the little party sat around a nice table in the wizard's camp, that evening ; "why should you condemn yourself to the rough life of a miner? Your talents and education are sufficient to do far better."

The Discos and Sinclairs were alone, for the miners had returned to their corral.

"Ah! boy. The time was when I thought so too. But the cursed bottle has been my ruin."

"Take the pledge and keep it," said Herbert.

"Ay, father. Do," urged Rose and Willy.

"If I thought I could, I would," said old Disco. "But suppose I did, what do you want?"

"I want Rose," said Herbert. "See here, Mr. Disco, I have prospered well in my undertakings, for ten years. I have made money, invested and reinvested till I can show you a hundred and sixty thousand dollars in bonds, besides real estate. We have enough for all. Live with us, and I'll teach Willy my trade, and so he'll be able to take my place and make his fortune."

What Mr. Disco's answer was, I can not say positively.

But it is certain that his wagon left the caravan next morning, and that it was seen heading back to the States, a little while after, in company with a black express-wagon.

Rose and Herbert were married in New Orleans and the wizard turned planter.

But Master Willy Disco evinced such a decided talent for modern magic that there is a talk of his coming out some day and eclipsing HARTZ, with the assistance of his lovely young wife, who is no other than pretty Juliet, the sister and confederate of THE BLACK WIZARD OF THE PLAINS.

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